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Shakespeare's use of letters in twelve representative plays

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SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF LETTERS
IN TWELVE REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS

BY

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To J. N. M.

"A merry heart goes all the day."

The Winter's Tale, IV, 11, 135.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study of Shakespeare's use of letters is two-fold. First, representative plays will be examined to determine some of the ways in which letters contributed to such important elements as plot structure, character delineation, creation of atmosphere, heightening of suspense, or a combination of two or more of these and possibly other uses. In addition, the letters will be studied for the evidence they may furnish, in themselves, of the development of Shakespeare's dramatic technique and artistry.

For such a study it seems desirable to consider what precedents Shakespeare had for the use of correspondence in plays by his forerunners, and also how his employment of the letter device compares with that of his contemporaries. In this connection, examples will be studied of representative plays by the classical dramatists, by English predecessors, and by some of his contemporaries. As each of the selected plays of Shakespeare is analyzed, the letters in it must be compared with the letters in his sources in order to determine which letters, and

which aspects of their use, are attributable only to Shakespeare.

Not all of Shakespeare's plays contain either letters or mention of letters, but an impressive number do.

. . . there are in the plays of Shakespeare well over 180 references to letters. Within that broad category of references, there are better than 110 letters used in the plays, of which 92 are certainly seen on the stage while others may have been used as stage property, and 42 are completely or partially read or paraphrased.¹

An adequate study of all of the letters actually used in Shakespeare's plays obviously exceeds the scope of this thesis. For this reason, twelve of his plays containing letters have been chosen as representative both of the various periods of his development and also of the various types of drama he produced.

Edward Dowden, late Professor of English Literature at the University of Dublin, has traced the development of Shakespeare's dramatic

¹ Katherine Elizabeth Moroney, The Letter as a Dramatic Device in Shakespeare's Plays. A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1956). Although the title of her dissertation implies a prior coverage of the research area of this thesis, the information quoted above is the only instance of reliance in this paper on her work. The first draft of the thesis here submitted (comprising approximately three-fourths of the paper in its final form) was completed before the existence of Miss Moroney's dissertation was learned. An abstract of it is attached as Appendix A. A reading of the microfilm of her entire dissertation reveals significant differences from this thesis in approach, purpose, and organization. The first 57 of her 155 pages are devoted to a history of the development of the art of letter writing, completely apart from the drama, and to the various types of letters in popular use in Shakespeare's day. She then considers each type, showing how Shakespeare used it dramatically by citing examples taken from his plays. She does not discuss the history of the development of letters within the drama, nor does she analyze the plays chronologically for evidence of Shakespeare's dramatic development as revealed in his use of letters.

art through four stages to which he has given interesting descriptive names: (1) "In the workshop" (1590-95), which includes the early comedies, early chronicle plays, and an early, romantic tragedy; (2) "In the world" (1595-1600), which includes the more mature chronicle plays, the romantic comedies, and an historical tragedy; (3) "Out of the depths" (1600-1608), which includes the great tragedies and somber, bitter tragicomedies; and (4) "On the heights" (1609-1611), which includes the romances and several fragments.²

The plays³ selected for this study include some which are representative of each of the above periods, and also of the various types indicated after their titles:

From the "In the Workshop" period (1590-95):

Two Gentlemen of Verona (ca. 1591-92), a light comedy of intrigue.

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet (ca. 1594-95), an early, or romantic tragedy.

From the "In the World" period (1595-1600):

Henry IV, Part I (ca. 1598), a chronicle play.

Much Ado About Nothing (ca. 1598-99), a joyous romantic comedy.

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar (ca. 1599), a Roman tragedy.

²Edward Dowden, Shakspere (Vol. III of Literature Primers, ed. J. R. Green. (New York: American Book Company, [n. d.]), pp. 56-60.

³William Shakespeare, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed., with a glossary, by W. J. Craig (London: Oxford University Press, 1925). All material quoted from Shakespeare in this study is taken from this edition.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will (ca. 1600), a romantic high comedy.

From the "De Profundis" period (1600-08):

The History of Troilus and Cressida (ca. 1601-02), a somber problem drama that is "neither a comedy nor a tragedy."⁴

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (ca. 1602), a revenge tragedy.

The Tragedy of King Lear (ca. 1605-06), a tragedy of retribution.

The Tragedy of Macbeth (ca. 1606), a chronicle-play tragedy.

From the "On the Heights" period (1609-11):

Cymbeline (1609-10), a late romance, or romantic tragi-comedy.

The Winter's Tale (ca. 1610-11), a dramatic romance.

⁴William Bradley Otis and Morris H. Needleman, An Outline-History of English Literature, Vol. I: To Dryden. 4th edition. (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1952), p. 202.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

I. CLASSICAL DRAMA

Drama had its origins in the ancient Greek "mysteries," or religious rites, which were performed in honor of various gods such as Dionysius. At first these celebrations consisted of a protagonist who gave a dramatic recital of the important event being celebrated in the life of the particular god, and a chorus of listeners who participated with comment and dance. Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) introduced a second actor in the form of a messenger who gave an oral report of events having happened previously or in another place, and when conversation between the protagonist and messenger took place, dramatic dialogue had its beginning. Sophocles (ca. 495-405 B.C.) introduced a third actor, and later a fourth, and action was no longer simply reported upon by a messenger but actually took place on the stage. When Euripides (ca. 480-406 B.C.) added more characters, with speeches and actions suitable to their individual parts, the Greek religious rites had developed into plays with the basic forms we recognize as drama today.

Messenger scenes constituted the origin of Greek drama and remained an integral part of it, but in only two of the extant plays was a written "message" introduced. In Euripides' Iphigenia in Taurus⁵ (ca. 420 B.C.), a letter forms the basis of a vital recognition scene. Iphigenia, daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra, at the point of being sacrificed by her father to gain favorable winds for the voyage of the Greek fleet to Troy, had been snatched from the altar by the goddess Diana, and carried away to the wild, uncouth land of Taurus. There she served for many years as high priestess in the temple of Diana where, to her homesickness for her native Mycenae, there was added the horror of being forced by the barbaric King Thoas to anoint for sacrifice to the goddess all strangers who might be apprehended.

When the play opens, herdsmen report the capture of two Greek youths, who shortly are brought in chains before her for the customary rites before being slain on Diana's altar. She does not know that one is her brother, Orestes, and the other, Pylades, is his friend and brother-in-law, husband of their sister Electra. Orestes refuses to give her his name, but in response to her continued questions, admits that he is from Mycenae. Iphigenia promises to save his life if he will carry a letter to Mycenae for her, but he insists that Pylades be spared to serve as messenger. She then makes Pylades swear to deliver her letter, and, in the event that it might be lost in a disaster at sea, tells him its contents

⁵Euripides, Iphigenia in Taurus, trans. by Robert Potter, in Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr., eds., The Complete Greek Drama. 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1938), I, 1055-1114.

in order that he may be prepared to deliver the message orally.

IPHIGENIA (reading)

This message to Orestes, to the Son
Of Agamemnon, bear:--She, who was slain
At Aulis, Iphigenia, sends thee this:
She lives, but not to those who then were there.

ORESTES

Where is she? from the dead return'd to life?

IPHIGENIA

She whom thou seest: but interrupt me not.

/continues reading/

To Argos, O my brother, ere I die,
Bear me from this barbaric land, and far
Remove me from this altar's bloody rites,
At which to slay the stranger is my charge. . . .

* * *

Tell him the goddess saved me, in exchange
A hind presenting, which my father slew
A victim, deeming that he plunged his sword
Deep in my breast: me in this land she placed.
Thou hast my charge: and this my letter speaks.

PYLADES

O, thou hast bound me with an easy oath:
What I have sworn with honest purpose, long
Defer I not, but thus discharge mine oath.
To thee a letter from thy sister, lo,
I bear, Orestes; and I give it thee.
(PYLADES hands the letter to ORESTES.)

ORESTES

I do receive it, but forbear to uncloset
Its foldings, greater pleasure first to enjoy
Than words can give. My sister, O most dear,
Astonish'd ev'n to disbelief, I throw
Mine arms around thee with a fond embrace,⁶
In transport at the wondrous things I hear.

Transported indeed, the brother and sister eagerly verify each
other's identity. Pylades interrupts to remind Orestes that he has been

⁶Ibid., ll. 769-778, 785-798.

ordered by Apollo to seize the statue of Diana from the temple there and carry it back to Athens. Iphigenia then plans and successfully carries out the escape of the three of them, with the statue, from Taurus.

Although this letter in Iphigenia in Taurus is the only one in any of the thirty-three extant Greek tragedies (seven by Aeschylus, seven by Sophocles, and nineteen by Euripides), it illustrates several of the important dramatic possibilities of the use of correspondence in a play, as long as 2,000 years before Shakespeare. Iphigenia's letter is the pivot on which the plot turns.

Aristotle was the first to work out express standards of dramatic criticism:

. . . there naturally are two causes for dramatic actions, character and thought, because of which all the agents experience good or bad fortune. The plot is the imitation of the action. By plot I mean the synthesis of the individual acts, by character that according to which we say that those who act are of some certain sort, and by thought I mean those passages in which the speakers show something by argument or deliver an opinion. Every tragedy, then, must have six parts . . . These are plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and music. . . . [Speaking of plot] The most important of these is the putting together of the separate actions, for tragedy is an imitation not of men but of actions and life. . . . They do not, then, act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are . . . Besides this, the chief things by means of which tragedy moves the feelings of the audience are parts of the plot, namely, reversals and recognitions. . . . The first principle and as it were the soul of tragedy is the plot; the characters are in the second place. . . . Character is that which reveals an agent's moral habit, showing of what sort it is, for there is no character in those speeches in which the speaker does not clearly choose or avoid something.⁷

⁷ Aristotle, The Poetics, Chap. VI, 19 b 31, 50 a 15, 50 a 33, and 50 b 3, from excerpts of the translation of the Alfred Gudeman text by Allan H. Gilbert in his Literary Criticism Plato to Dryden (New York: American Book Company, 1940), pp. 68-123.

The letter brings about the dramatic recognition of the siblings and provides for a reversal of their fortunes. The fact that the audience knows that Iphigenia had been preparing the death of the very brother to whom her letter is addressed furnishes dramatic irony which heightens suspense. The choice that Orestes and Pylades each make, to stay and be sacrificed in order that his friend may live to carry the letter, reveals their nobility and loyalty, and Iphigenia's choice to risk discovery in order to send a letter beseeching rescue reveals her love of family and country, and her hatred of the terrible sacrificial rites in which she has been forced to participate. Finally, there is tremendous drama in the simple directness of Pylades' action in handing over the letter to Orestes.

Of the fifty-four comedies of Aristophanes (ca. 445-380 B.C.) only eleven have come down to us, and only one of these employs a written message. Properly speaking, it is not a personal letter but a communication of the government. In his satirical farce, The Ecclesiazusae (392 B.C.),⁸ the women of Athens are shown to have seized control of the city government by means of a clever ruse. Their leader, Praxagora, has immediately issued some revolutionary decrees, one of which she explains to her husband:

PRAXAGORA

. . . I intend that women shall belong to all men in common, and each shall beget children by any man that wishes to have her.

⁸ Aristophanes, The Ecclesiazusae, in Oates and O'Neill, ed., op. cit., II, 1002-1055.

BLEPYRUS

But all will go to the prettiest woman and try to lay her.

PRAXAGORA

The ugliest and most flat-nosed will be side by side with the most charming, and to win the latter's favours, a man will first have to get into the former.⁹

Not long thereafter, the action shifts to the houses of two prostitutes, one belonging to a young girl and the other to an old woman. A young man is shown ardently courting the young girl at her window, but the old woman breaks it up by saying that under the new order of things, he must busy himself with her first.

YOUNG MAN

I abhor such as you, and I will never, never consent.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But, by Zeus, here is something will force you to it.

(She shows him a document.)

* * *

Listen. "The women have decreed that if a young man desires a young girl, he can only lay her after having satisfied an old woman; and if he refuses and goes to seek a maiden, the old women are authorized to seize him and drag him in."¹⁰

While the young man is protesting, two other old women, even older and uglier than the first, drag him off with them!

The document was supplemental to the plot; it served to objectify in action on the stage the revolutionary character and power of the new order in an Athens controlled by the women, and to reinforce its comic consequences. It added to the satire, but not to the depiction of char-

⁹Ibid., ll. 614-619.

¹⁰Ibid., ll. 1011-1012, 1016-1019.

acter. Unlike the letter in Iphigenia in Taurus, which was an integral part of the plot, the document in The Ecclesiazusae played a minor role in comparison with three messenger scenes which carried the real burden of the plot.

It can be seen from the preceding paragraphs that early Greek drama literally grew out of messenger scenes, that such scenes continued to be used to bring to the attention of the audience events and characters not actually seen on the stage, and that the written message did not supplant the spoken report of a messenger in depicting either plot or character.

Aristophanes represented the period known as the Old Comedy in Greek literature. This was followed by the more timid Middle Comedy (ca. 380-336 B.C.) of Alexis and Theophrastus, which was concerned less with politics and contemporary persons and more with travesties on tragedies and mythological characters; no examples of it, however, are extant. The New Comedy (336-ca. 262 B.C.) which followed gradually substituted plots and characters drawn from the everyday actions of typical middle or lower class persons. The result was essentially a comedy of manners in which the elaborate choruses of the Old Comedy were replaced by occasional lyrics, interludes, or extended soliloquies; the plots were based on intrigue, or mistaken identity and recognition, and on sudden reversals; and the characters were developed around types such as the miserly father, scheming parasite, military braggart, or grasping courtesan. The most famous of the Greek writers of New Comedy were Menander (ca. 343-291 B.C.), Philemon (ca. 350-ca. 262 B.C.), and

Diphilus of Athens (flourished ca. 300 B.C.). They each appear to have written approximately a hundred comedies, but only a few fragments survive. Our knowledge of their plays comes from the Roman comedies based on them, which would indicate that they may have contained a number of letters, as shall be seen later in considering the works of Plautus.

Roman writers followed Greek models in drama as well as in other types of literature, and their use of letters is reflected in this. Possibly the greatest of the early Roman writers of tragedy was Quintus Ennius (239-169 B.C.), but only fragments of twenty of his plays survive. The tragedies of Lucius Anneaus Seneca (ca. 3 B.C.-65 A.D.) are more important historically because the alterations and distinctive additions (such as a vengeful ghost) which he made in the reworking of his Greek models made him the real precursor of the tragic dramatists of Italy, France, and England. Professor Duckworth summarized his influence in this way:

The lofty themes and tragic power of Greek drama did not appeal to the Renaissance playwrights, but Seneca they were able to understand and appreciate. It was thus inevitable that he should eclipse the Greek poets and become the greatest force in the moulding of Renaissance tragedy.¹¹

Nine tragedies by Seneca survive; all of them were based on Greek plays by Aeschulus, Sophocles, or Euripides, and none contains either a letter or reference to a letter. One is of special interest, however, in a study of the tragedies of revenge by Kyd, Shakespeare, Webster,

¹¹George E. Duckworth, ed., The Complete Roman Drama. 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1942), I, xli.

Chapman, and other Elizabethans, according to Professor Duckworth.

The Thyestes is the most gruesome of Seneca's tragedies, and in many respects one of the most famous. It provided the model for later plays of revenge, such as Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, and has perhaps exerted a greater influence than Seneca's other plays.¹²

One additional Roman tragedy, Octavia, is frequently attributed to Seneca; it also contains no letters, but it is important as a precursor of Elizabethan historical drama. Professor Duckworth says of this play:

The Octavia enjoys a unique distinction, for it is the only fabula praetexta, or Roman historical play, which has survived to our day . . . [It] gives in dramatic form a picture of the historical events of the year 62 A.D. . . . [which] parallel with amazing fidelity the account of the period given by Tacitus. . . .¹³

The most important writer of Roman comedy was Titus Maccius Plautus (ca. 254-184 B.C.). Probably less than half of the more than a hundred plays attributed to him were actually written by Plautus, and only twenty of them survive. These were not modeled on the early Greek comedy of Aristophanes, but on the New Comedy of Menander and his contemporaries. Howe and Harrer state that as a result of the Macedonian conquests, the outspoken political satire of the early Greek comedy had become no longer safe, and--

. . . in its place was gradually developed a comedy which indulged in satire on character and situation as manifested in the complexities of everyday experience. . . . This dramatic development is perhaps best described as a comedy of manners. . . . In this new comedy the technique of tragedy as perfected by Euripides was found to be better adapted to the new subject matter than of the old

¹²Duckworth, op. cit., II, 751.

¹³Ibid., p. 751.

comedy. . . . This is the type of play which particularly influenced the Roman, and through the Roman, the modern drama.¹⁴

In four of the comedies of Plautus (Amphitryon, Comedy of Asses, Truculentus, and Phormio) there are one or more interesting references to letters, but they are not essential to the plot. In seven plays (The Two Bacchides, Curriculo, Epidicus, The Braggart Warrior, The Girl from Persia, Pseudolus, and The Three Penny Day), from one to four letters are used by scheming parasites, slaves, courtesans, parents, or lovers as the means of carrying out their intrigues, and so form important and usually humorous parts of the action--indeed, in some instances, they are essential to it. Some of these letters reveal special quirks which individualize the "humors" of the stock characters involved, and most of them actually appear on the stage, where they are read or paraphrased by the writer, the messenger, or the recipient. Inasmuch as almost all of Plautus' plays have been identified with Greek models, either singly or by a process of combination known as contaminatio, it would seem that similar letters appeared in his models. This would almost certainly be true, for example, in The Two Bacchides, based on Menander's lost play, The Double Deceiver, because the entire plot turns on the use of two letters.

Terence (Publius Terentius Afer, ca. 185-159 B.C.) was the most important successor of Plautus. He produced six comedies, all of which survive. All were based on Greek comedies (four by Menander and two by

¹⁴George Howe and Gustave Adolphus Harrer, eds., Greek Literature in Translation (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), p. 528.

Apollodorus, a follower of Menander); none contains any letters.

The comedies of Plautus and Terence continued to be acted throughout the period of the Roman Empire. The one later Latin comedy which survives comes from the early part of the fifth century, almost six hundred years after Plautus, and is in the nature of a sequel to one of his plays. The unknown author of the Querolus, or The Pot of Gold depicts his title character, Querolus, as the son of the miser, Euclio, who was the principal character in Plautus' The Pot of Gold. In his introduction to the play, Professor Duckworth discusses it as a sort of medieval link between the comedies of the Roman classical period and those of the Italian Renaissance.

The traditional view . . . is that the play Querolus is a direct adaptation or reworking of the Plautine comedy. Nothing could be further from the truth. . . . The author of the Querolus knew Plautus' play, but developed his own plot along original lines. . . . the plot may go back to a Greek original. But it is undoubtedly true that the play contains far more philosophical and religious thought than is to be found in any play of Plautus or Terence. . . . It portrays its medieval character by putting the moral first and using the story to illustrate the moral. . . . It is a new creation which is wholly characteristic of the age in which the dramatist lived . . . and was well-known in the Middle Ages.¹⁵

There is only one letter in the Querolus, but it is essential to the action of the play. The wealthy miser, Euclio, far from home and on his death bed, has given Mandrogerus, a parasite, a letter appointing him joint legal heir with his (Euclio's) son on the condition that the parasite will honestly reveal to the son the location of the father's hidden pot of gold. The gold is recovered by the son in spite of the

¹⁵Duckworth, op. cit., II, 893-895.

parasite's efforts to trick him out of it, but the miser's Household God predicts:

He Mandrogerus will even have the audacity to present the letter in which he was named joint heir on the condition that he reveal the pot of gold to Querolus without trickery.¹⁶

As predicted, the parasite does present the letter in support of his claim to half the treasure. Querolus reads it aloud, quite properly insists that Mandrogerus has forfeited his claim because of his trickery, but in the end is cleverly persuaded to share a portion of the money with the would-be thief. The letter itself was essential to the action of the play from beginning to end, and the reaction to its contents reveals not only the treachery and gall of the parasite's character, but also the stupidity of the son in being so easily led to misconstrue its contents.

In summary, letters were used in the earliest periods of classical drama, both in tragedy and in comedy, but much more so in the latter. In terms of Aristotle's conception of drama, they were used to motivate, complicate, and resolve plot, to effect reversals and recognitions, and to reveal character, and they were expressed in diction suitable to the writer and the occasion. The fact that the comedies of Plautus continued to be performed and read on into the Middle Ages provided for the use of letters to be recognized as a dramatic device and to be so employed by the dramatists of the Renaissance. In Duckworth's words--

With the development of the Italian, French, and English comedy in the sixteenth century the Roman playwrights were considered norms

¹⁶ Anonymous, Querolus, V, 1, in Duckworth, op. cit., II, 939.

of excellence. Their plays were translated and acted on the stage, and new comedies were composed which were indebted to the Roman works for their plots, characters, and treatment. . . . Acts and scenes from different Latin plays were joined in new combinations, and the same Plautine or Terentian comedy appeared in various forms in different parts of Europe. Berrardo, Machiavelli, Ariosto, Tressino, Aretino . . . in Italy, Baif, Larivey, Rotrou, Scarron, Moliere . . . in France, Shakespeare, Heywood . . . and others in England all fall, directly or indirectly, under the Roman influence, and the list of their imitations and adaptations is long.¹⁷

Shakespeare's debt to this tradition can be seen in many of his plays.

II. PRE-SHAKESPEAREAN ENGLISH DRAMA

English drama stems from two main roots. As with the Greek, its indigenous source was in early religious dramatizations of the worship service, beginning with simple dialogues such as the "Quem Quaeritis" trope¹⁸ in the ninth century. These religious dramatizations were gradually expanded in number of characters and in length and subject matter of "plot," and were moved from the church choir, where they were originally performed by choir and clergy, to the church yard, where they were performed eventually by laity who were guild members or semi-professional actors. The miracle, mystery, and morality plays, and the comic folk-play interludes which developed through the next five centuries retained their popularity among the common people down to Shakespeare's day.

The other main source of English drama was not native, but classi-

¹⁷Duckworth, op. cit., I, xxxv.

¹⁸Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 3.

cal, in origin.

In the first quarter of the sixteenth century the scholars of England came under the influence of the great neo-classical revival of Roman plays inaugurated by the Italian academies, and English high schools and colleges began to present before school audiences (and occasionally, by invitation, before the Court and before persons of eminence) the comedies of Terence and Plautus. Though at first the students acted the original plays of the Roman dramatists, very soon they began to compose and present plays modeled after the classical masterpieces. The earliest of the English adaptations of Roman comedy that has come down to us is Roister Doister, written by Nicholas Udall, and, in all probability, while he was headmaster of Eton, 1534-41.¹⁹

Udall (1505-1556), in the manner of his Roman predecessors, opened Roister Doister²⁰ with a Prologue addressed to the audience; in it the speaker praises Plautus and Terence as the best of the "wyse poets long time heretofore," whose comedies produced mirth that "prolongeth life and causeth health . . . [and] increaseth amitie." This was not mere lip service, for the play that follows is typically Plautean in its plot of intrigue, its use of practical jokes, its wealth of double entendre, and its stock characters such as the braggart soldier.

Early in the play the vain, blustering Ralph Roister Doister enlists the aid of old Madge Mumblecrust in his suit for the hand of her wealthy Mistress Oustance, while his mischievous, trouble-making comrade, Mathewe Merygreeke, looks on teasingly.

R. ROYSTER (producing a letter). Now, nurse,
take this same letter here to thy
mistresse;

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 423.

²⁰ Nicholas Udall, Roister Doister, in Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., op. cit., pp. 423-468.

And, as my trust is in thee, ply thy busi-
nesse.

M. MUMBL. It shalbe done.

M. MERY. Who made it?

R. ROYSTER. I wrote it, ech whit.

M. MERY. Then nedes it no mending.

* * *

R. ROYSTER. Now may I repose me,

Custance is mine owne.

Let vs sing and play homeward, that it may
be knowne.

M. MERY. But are you sure that your
letter is well enough?

R. ROYSTER. I wrote it my-selfe!²¹

M. MERY. Then sing we to dinner!

The lovely widow, however, is betrothed to Gawin Goodlucke, and does not even bother to open Ralph's letter.

M. MUMBL. Best open the writing, and see what it doth
speake.

C. CUSTANCE. At thys time, nourse, I will
neither reade ne breake.²²

Ralph's letter serves several dramatic purposes. First, as the beginning of Ralph's suit for Custance, it initiates the action of the play, which centers on his courtship of her. Secondly, although we do not yet know the contents of the letter, the reactions of the several players toward it delineate outstanding traits of their personality and character--Ralph's extreme self-confidence, Merygreeke's ability to use double talk to make fun of Ralph's pomposity while appearing to agree with him, Margerie Mumblecrust's privileged meddlesomeness, and Mistress Custance's aloof indifference.

²¹Ibid., I, iv, ll. 125-131, 137-140.

²²Ibid., I, iv, ll. 13-14.

When Ralph receives no answer to his letter, he sends Merygreeke to Custance to get a reply.

C. CUSTANCE. In-dede, true it is that a
letter I haue;
But I neuer reade it yet, as God me
saue!

M. MERY. Ye a woman, and your letter
so long vnredde?²³

She correctly guesses that the sender of the letter is Roister Doister, whom she considers "a very dolt and loute," and when Merygreeke says that his message is to tell her Roister Doister is willing to marry her if she will ask him (!), she angrily goes in her house declaring:

C. CUSTANCE. Let hym come when hym
lust, I wishe no better sport.
Fare ye well. I will in and read my great
letter;
I shall to my wower make answere the
better.²⁴

After Ralph arrives and is told that Mistress Custance has rejected him, he begs Merygreeke to intercede for him. The lady then furiously produces the letter for Merygreeke to read.

M. MERY. Let vs see your letter.
C. CUSTANCE. Holde; reade it, if ye can,
And see what letter it is to winne a woman!

* * *

(He opens the letter, and reads.)
M. MERY. "Sweete mistresse, where as I
loue you nothing at all,
Regarding your substance and richesse
chiefe of all,

²³Ibid., III, ii, ll. 67-69.

²⁴Ibid., III, ii, ll. 96-98.

For your personage, beautilie, demeanour
 and wit,
 I commende me vnto you neuer a whit.
 Sorie to heare report of your good wel-
 fare.
 For (as I heare say) suche your conditions
 are
 That ye be worthie fauour of no liuing man.
 To be abhorred of euery honest man;
 To be taken for a woman enclined to vice;
 Nothing at all to vertue gyuing hir due
 price.

* * *

And nowe by these presentes I do you ad-
 uertise
 That I am minded to marrie you in no wise. . . .²⁵

The letter continues at length in like vein, and closes with a surpris-
 ing exhortation:

Thus good mistresse Custance, the Lorde
 you saue and kepe
 From me Roister Doister, whether I wake
 or slepe.
 Who fauoureth you no lesse (ye may be
 bolde)
 Than this letter purporteth, which ye haue
 vnfolde."
 C. CUSTANCE. Howe by this letter of
 loue? is it not fine?
 R. ROYSTER. By the armes of Caleys, it is
 none of myne!²⁶

After Mistress Custance leaves, Merygreeke with malicious double-
 talk pretends to console the blubbering Ralph, who finally sends for the
 scribe to whom he had dictated the letter which he had then copied in
 his own hand. The scribe reads the letter as it had been punctuated by

²⁵Ibid., III, iv, ll. 29-31, 36-45, 48-49.

²⁶Ibid., III, iv, ll. 67-72.

him:

SCRIVENER. "Sweete mistresss, where as
I loue you--nothing at all
Regarding your riches and substance,
chiefe of all
For your personage, beautie, demeanour
and witte--
I commend me vnto you. Neuer a whitte
Sory to heare reporte of your good welfare;
For (as I heare say) suche your conditions are
That ye be worthie fauour; of no liuing man
To be abhorred; of euery honest man
To be taken for a woman enclined to vice
Nothing at all; to vertue giuing hir due price.

* * *

And nowe by these presents I doe you aduertise
That I am minded to marrie you--in no wyse
For your goodes and substance; I can be content
To take you as you are. . . .

* * *

Thus, good mistresse Custance, the Lorde you
saue and kepe.
From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or slepe,
Who fauoureth you no lesse (ye may be bolde)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye haue
vnfolde."
Now, sir, what default can ye finde in this
letter?
R. ROYSTER. Of truth, in my mynde there can
not be a better.
SCRIVENER. Then was the fault in reedyng, and
not in writyng,--
No, nor, I dare say, in the fourme of endityng.
But who read this letter, that it sounded so nought?
M. MERY. I redde it, in-deede.
SCRIVENER. Ye red it not as ye ought.²⁷

The clever changing of the meaning of this letter by the way in
which Merygreeke had read it produced a comic scene that must have been

²⁷Ibid., III, v, ll. 36-45, 48-51, 80-89.

dramatically satisfying to the school audience for whom it was written. The grammarians, especially, of various academies where the play appears to have been enacted frequently over a period of about forty years, must have taken particular delight in it as a dramatic object lesson for careless scholars. In Roister Doister we see, then, that the letter provides both comic mirth and dramatic action; it objectifies the plot or "conflict" between the balloon-like conceit of Ralph and the pin-pricking wit of Merygreke, and also between the pompous suitor and the disdainful lady. It is extremely clever, but great drama demands a conflict of genuine love, hate, passion, or revenge--not a conflict of commas!

In addition to the school play Roister Doister, at least one other pre-Shakespearean English drama made use of letters; this was the Inns of Court play, The Tragedy of Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex (1561),²⁸ which is famous as the first regular English tragedy.

The Inns of Court Plays, following the models of the classical drama, are closely akin to the School Plays; but they were performed by gallants of fashion (many of them young noblemen), in the highest circles of London society, and . . . they show the marked influence of the contemporary Italian drama. Gorboduc, famous as the first regular English tragedy, was composed by Thomas Sackville (later Earl of Dorset and Lord High Treasurer) and Thomas Norton (whose brilliant career as a lawyer and courtier was cut short by his early death). It was acted by the young gentlemen of the Inner Temple in 1561-62 on the occasion of their annual Christmas festival, and was repeated by them before Queen Elizabeth on January 18, 1561-62, at Whitehall Palace.²⁹

²⁸ Thomas Norton and Edward Sackville, Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex, in Joseph Quincy Adams, op. cit., pp. 503-535.

²⁹ Adams, op. cit., p. 503.

The basic plot of Gorboduc begins with a situation similar to that of King Lear. It is told in "The Argument of The Tragedie," which was printed on the back of the title page of the authorized edition of 1570:

Gorboduc, king of Brittain, diuided his realme in his lifetime to his sonnes, Ferrex and Porrex; the sonnes fell to discension; the yonger killed the elder; the mother, that more dearly loued the elder, for reuenge killed the yonger; the people, moued with the crueltie of the fact, rose in rebellion and slew both father and mother; the nobilitie assembled and most terribly destroyed the rebels; and afterwarde . . . they fell to ciuill warre . . .³⁰

In the play, both the king and each of his two sons are attended by a wise counsellor and by a dishonest adviser or parasite. Much of the dialogue is taken up with long, Senecan speeches of analysis and persuasion declaimed alternately by the honest and dishonest adviser of each, which indicate the Inns of Court background and legal-political interest of the actors and their audience. When the parasite Tyndar is advising Porrex, the younger son, to prepare to fight his brother, he uses rumors and letters to support his argument:

TYND. . . .
Loe, secrete quarrels runne about his court
To bring the name of you, my lorde, in hate.

* * *

In secrete I was counselled by my frendes
To hast me thence, and brought you, as you know,
Letters from those that both can truely tell³¹
And would not write vnless they knew it well.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 504.

³¹ Sackville and Norton, Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex, Act II, 11, 11. 10-11, 25-28.

The third act opens with the old king Gorboduc bewailing the armed rivalry which has arisen between his sons.

GORB. Beholde, my lordes! read ye this letter here!
Loe, it contains the ruine of our realme,
If timelie speede prouide not hastie helpe.

* * *

Read, read, my lordes! This is the matter why
I called ye nowe to haue your good aduysa.

The letter from Dordan, the Counsellour of the
elder prince.

Eubulus readeth the letter:

"My Soueraigne Lord; what I am loth to write,
But lothest am to see, that I am forced
By letters nowe to make you vnderstande.
My lord Ferrex, your eldest sonne, misledde
By traitorous fraude of yong vntempred wittes
Assembleth force agaynst your yonger sonne;
Ne can my counsell yet withdrawe the heate
And furious panges of hys enflamed head.
Disdaine, sayth he, of his disheritance
Armes him to wreke the great pretended wrong
With ciuyll sword vpon his brothers life.
If present helpe do not restraine this rage,
This flame will wast your sonnes, your land, and you.

Your Maiesties faithfull and most humble
subject,
DORDAN."³²

The reference in Act II to letters (which may or may not be held as stage properties in Tyndar's hand, but which are not read) furthers the plot in so far as it adds the psychological weight of apparent confirmation in writing of the parasite's arguments in support of his fatally unwise advice to Gorboduc's younger son. The letter in Act III is not only seen on the stage but read in its entirety; in formally cer-

³²Ibid., III, 1, ll. 19-21, 27-41.

rect diction but with a dramatic sense of urgency it serves to tell what equally fatal advice the other son is following, and to heighten the suspense and draw Gorboduc himself into the tragedy. Both serve as probably the first use in an English play of letters to forward political intrigue and tragic action, purposes for which Shakespeare will later put them to similar use many times.

Roister Doister and Gorboduc are typical of the drama produced by Shakespeare's predecessors between 1525 and 1575. In addition to Udall, Sackville, and Norton, there were William Stevenson, author of the vernacular University comedy Gammer Gurton's Needle (ca. 1554-59), John Heywood, author of The Four P's (ca. 1525) and other popular farces, and George Gascoigne, author of comedies and tragedies adapted from Italian versions of classical drama. These writers used the English language for their plays and usually English names for their characters, but their plots were based on classical models from Latin or Italian drama, and their characters were frequently Italianate-Englishmen, as it were, rather than true native-born stock. Ferrex and Porruix are royal princes, but they are not Hal and Hotspur; Roister Doister is a military braggart, but he is not Sir John Falstaff. In like manner, although the playwrights of this period used letters to initiate, report, or complicate action, and sometimes to depict typical characters, the letters themselves are not vibrant expressions of highly individualized wit or passion.

III. CONTEMPORARY ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

Examples of the use of correspondence in plays were available to Shakespeare not only from his predecessors, but also from his contemporaries. To one group of these he was particularly indebted, as Professor Osgood of Princeton has pointed out.

During the decade between 1584 and 1594 a group of playwrights usually called the University Wits were unawares preparing the way for Shakespeare. They were all, certainly all but one, of either Oxford or Cambridge, where they could find experience in "classical" drama before their plunge into London. They were John Lyly, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe, and Christopher Marlowe.³³

These were the men who truly integrated (not merely superimposed) the classical traditions of Latin and Italian drama with popular native English elements from the miracle and morality plays and interludes, and thus created the Elizabethan drama which made the new public playhouses of London such successful business ventures. Shakespeare's experience with the stage began with his roles as an actor in some of their plays, and what he may have lacked in university training himself he appears to have absorbed rapidly from them as he became a collaborator and fellow playwright. One of these University Wits, Thomas Kyd (ca. 1558-94), was the author of one of the most successful and influential dramas of the period, The Spanish Tragedy (ca. 1585-90).³⁴

³³Charles Grosvenor Osgood, The Voice of England (2nd edition; New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 177.

³⁴Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Kyd's early death cut short his career at the height of his popularity. In his prefatory poem to the First Folio, Ben Jonson praised him indirectly by naming him as one of the three dramatists (the other two were Lyly and Marlowe) whom Shakespeare outshone.³⁵ Philip Edwards says, in his introduction to The Spanish Tragedy, that it was "a most ingenious and successful blending of the old and the new in drama,"³⁶ and that it was received with such enthusiasm when it was first performed at the Rose in 1592 that it was presented twenty times that season. The play's chief fame rests on the fact that it created a popular demand for the bloody "tragedy of revenge" which influenced Shakespeare and other practicing playwrights who sought to please the tastes of their public, and served as a model for many of their own tragedies.

The play begins with a Senecan prologue in which the Ghost of Andrea (son of the Spanish Marshal, Hieronimo) and the Spirit of Revenge appear in a scene reminiscent of the opening messenger scenes of ancient Greek drama. The Ghost tells about his love for Bel-imperia, niece of the King of Spain, of the battle in which he had been slain by Balthazar, son of the Duke of Portugal, and of his subsequent experiences in Hades, where Pluto granted him the Spirit of Revenge as his companion to insure that vengeance would be wreaked on Balthazar. Revenge then tells briefly

³⁵Ben Jonson, "To the memory of my beloved the author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us," ll. 29-30, in Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies: A Facsimile Edition, ed. Helge Kökeritz and Charles T. Frouty (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. unnumbered.

³⁶Philip Edwards, "Introduction," Kyd, op. cit., p. 11.

how Bel-imperia will avenge Andrea by killing Balthazar, and suggests:

Here sit we down to see the mystery,
And serve for Chorus in this tragedy.³⁷

They see Balthazar, held as an honored hostage in Spain, complaining to Lorenzo, nephew of the King, about his vain suit for the affection of Lorenzo's sister, Bel-imperia.

Bal. My feature is not to content her sight,
My words are rude and work her no delight,
The lines I send her are but harsh and ill,
Such as do drop from Pan or Masyas' quill.³⁸

There is no indication of the contents of the letter, and it appears to have no other place in the drama than as one of a list of indications that Bel-imperia is not interested in him.

Lorenzo tries to learn from Pedringano, Bel-imperia's man servant, if his sister has fallen in love with anyone else since the death of Andrea.

Lor. Speak man, and gain both friendship and reward:
I mean, whom loves she in Andrea's place?

* * *

Ped. O stay my lord, she loves Horatio.
Lor. What, Don Horatio our Knight Marshall's son?

* * *

Now say but how knowest thou he is her love,

* * *

Ped. She sent him letters which myself perus'd,
Full fraught with lines and arguments of love,
Preferring him before Prince Balthazar.³⁹

³⁷Kyd, *op. cit.*, I, i, ll. 90-91.

³⁸*Ibid.*, II, i, ll. 13-16.

³⁹*Ibid.*, II, i, ll. 62-63, 78-79, 81, 84-86.

The reference to these letters, the contents of which are only suggested, serves chiefly to let the audience know that Pedringano is a dishonest and disloyal servant who had read his mistress's letters, betrayed her confidence, and is willing to spy on her for her brother. The scene arouses sympathy and fear for Bel-imperia and lets us know that no good can be expected of the servant; this foreshadowing of evil increases dramatic interest. The three lines of Pedringano's speech, which refer to the letters as proof of what he has already revealed, could have been omitted without essentially changing the plot or characterization, however.

The next use of correspondence is in connection with an incident which is dramatic enough, but involves only minor characters and does not affect the action of the primary plot. Villuppo, a Portugese noble who escaped from the defeat by the Spaniards, has accused a fellow noble, Alexander, of responsibility for the death of Prince Balthazar. On the orders of the Viceroy, Alexander is just about to be executed when an ambassador arrives with letters from Spain.

Amb. Stay, hold a while,
And here, with pardon of his majesty,
Lay hands upon Villuppo.

Vice. Ambassador,
What news hath urg'd this sudden entrance?

Amb. Know, sovereign lord, that Balthazar doth live.

Vice. What say'st thou? Liveth Balthazar our son?

Amb. Your highness' son, Lord Balthazar, doth live;
And, well entreated in the court of Spain,
Humbly commends him to your majesty.
These eyes beheld, and these my followers,
With these, the letters of the king's commends,
Are happy witnesses of his highness' health. Gives him letters.
The KING looks on the letters, and proceeds.

Vice. [King]. 'Thy son doth live, your tribute is receiv'd,
Thy peace is made, and we are satisfied:
The rest resolve upon as things propos'd
For both our honours and thy benefit.'

Amb. These are his highness' farther articles. ⁴⁰
He gives him more letters.

The Viceroy (or King, as he is alternately called in the play) orders the innocent Alexander freed and condemns Villuppo, who confesses his treachery, to death. Although the other letters are not quoted, we are told elsewhere that they contain proposals for a marriage between Balthazar and Bel-imperia. It is, of course, the Ambassador's arrival and verbal report which alter the execution, so it would appear that this scene's contribution to the plot is chiefly in its addition to the play's growing atmosphere of treachery and violent death.

More treachery and another violent death occur in the next scene. While Bel-imperia is having a tryst with Horatio, her brother Lorenzo, accompanied by Balthazar and the latter's servant Serberine, and led by Pedringano (in disguise), set upon and kill Horatio. Horatio's father Hieronimo, Knight Marshal of Spain, finds his son's body but has no clue as to the murderers until a letter is dropped in his path:

Hier. What's here? a letter? tush, it is not so!
A letter written to Hieronimo!
'For want of ink, receive this bloody writ.
He hath my hapless brother hid from thee:
Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him,
For these were they that murdered thy son.
Hieronimo, revenge Horatio's death.
And better fare than Bel-imperia doth.'
What means this unexpected miracle?
My son slain by Lorenzo and the prince!

⁴⁰Ibid., III, 1, ll. 58-74.

What cause had they Horatio to malign?
 Or what might move thee, Bel-imperia,
 To accuse thy brother, had he been the mean?
 Hieronimo beware . . .
 This is devised to endanger thee,
 That thou by this Lorenzo shouldst accuse,
 And he, for thy dishonour done, should draw
 Thy life in question . . .⁴¹

This letter constitutes an essential part of the plot. It tells, although does not convince, Hieronimo who murdered his son, and stirs up fires of vengeance in his soul. The letter itself is dramatic--terse, bitter, blood-written, twice in six short lines calling for "revenge"--and dramatic in its introduction into the play--thrown secretly into the father's path. He still might not have been certain of the identity of the murderers if further events had not furnished convincing proof.

Lorenzo and Balthazar plot to eliminate the witnesses of their murder of Horatio by having Pedringano kill Serberine and then himself be executed for the deed, although they assure him they will protect him from punishment. Having kept his part of the bargain Pedringano confidently sends a letter from prison for their promised aid.

Mes. I have a letter to your lordship.
 Lor. From whence?
 Mes. From Pedringano that's imprison'd.
 Lor. So, he is in prison then?
 Mes. Ay, my good lord.
 Lor. What would he with us? He writes us here
 To stand good lord and help him in distress.
 Tell him I have his letters, know his mind,
 And what we may, let him assure him of.⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., III, II, ll. 24-37, 40-43.

⁴²Ibid., III, IV, ll. 52-58.

To make certain that Pedringano does not inform on him during the trial, Lorenzo treacherously sends him an empty box with a verbal assurance that a signed pardon is safely in it. Pedringano therefore is almost flippant at his trial before Marshal Hieronimo, but when condemned to death writes a last despairing appeal to Lorenzo which the hangman delivers instead, after the execution, to the Marshal who reads it:

Hier. 'My lord, I writ as mine extremes requir'd,
That you would labour my delivery:
If you neglect, my life is desperate,
And in my death I shall reveal the troth.
You know, my lord, I slew him for your sake,
And as confederate with the prince and you,
Won by rewards and hopeful promises,
I help to murder Don Horatio, too.'
Holp he to murder mine Horatio?
And actors in th' accursed tragedy
Wast thou, Lorenzo, Balthazar and thou,
Of whom my son, my son, deserv'd so well?

* * *

Now see I what I durst not then suspect,
That Bel-imperia's letter was not feign'd . . . ⁴³

The reading of this letter forms a dramatic and well-motivated climax and at the same time emphasizes its two basic themes of treachery and revenge; it unites dramatically the vengeance on Pedringano for his treachery to his mistress, with his vengeance in turn on Lorenzo's treachery to both Horatio and him by its exposure to Hieronimo, who would surely wreak vengeance in his turn. The wording of the letter is most appropriate, too; it reveals the desperation of a man condemned to death but still cunning enough to contrive a message that could not offend Lorenzo if the latter were faithful to his promise of protection,

⁴³ Ibid., III, vii, ll. 32-43, 49-50.

but could clearly bring down vengeance on him if unfaithful.

With this confirmation, Hieronimo goes to Bel-imperia and the two join in a plot to revenge his son's and her lover's death.

Hier. Madam, 'tis true, and now I find it so,
I found a letter, written in your name,
And in that letter, how Horatio died.
Pardon, O pardon, Bel-imperia,
My fear and care in not believing it,
Nor think I thoughtless think upon a mean
To let his death be unreveng'd at full . . .

Bel. Hieronimo, I will consent, conceal,
And aught that may effect for thine avail,⁴⁴
Join with thee to revenge Horatio's death.

Posing as actors in a play within the play, Hieronimo kills Lorenzo, Bel-imperia kills first Balthazar and then herself, and when questioned by the Duke, Hieronimo stabs him and then himself. The Ghost of Andrea re-caps the nine deaths by murder or suicide, and retires satisfied with (the Spirit of) Revenge back to Hades.

To recapitulate, Kyd has used letters or series of letters six times in The Spanish Tragedy in what appears to be an ascending order of dramatic purpose and power. First, there is Balthazar's mention of his ignored love letters to Bel-imperia; these are not quoted, reveal no character, and do not affect the action. Secondly, there is Pedringano's mention of Bel-imperia's love letters to Horatio. These are not quoted and do not reveal the writer's characteristics, but their mention does reveal Pedringano's treachery and serves to motivate the joint plot of Lorenzo to get rid of a person he considers unsuitable for his sister,

⁴⁴Ibid., IV, i, ll. 35-41, 46-48.

and of Balthazar to remove the apparent obstacle to his suit of her. Part of the third letter, one of several from the King of Spain to the Viceroy of Portugal, is read. It is purely formal, but important because the Ambassador who delivers it saves Alexander's life by proof of Villuppo's treachery (heightening the mood of dark intrigue), and because the proposal of a marriage between Bel-imperia and Balthazar speeds and intensifies the plot. The fourth letter, the blood-written message from Bel-imperia, read in full by Hieronimo, is important to both plot and characterization. The fifth letter, Pedringano's appeal to Lorenzo, is also important to plot and characterization, and prepares the way for the sixth letter--Pedringano's second to Lorenzo, but delivered posthumously to Hieronimo--which provides a unified, striking climax to the three related plots.

Kyd is presumed to be the author of another Elizabethan drama, The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent (1592),⁴⁵ in which letters also play an important part. It is considered the earliest domestic tragedy in English literature, and although it is Senecan in its divisions into acts and scenes, it is thoroughly English in subject matter, characters, and setting; it is not based on the hamartia (tragic flaw) of a renowned personage, but on the sordid murder of a country gentleman which was actually committed in Kent in 1552.

⁴⁵ Thomas Kyd, Arden of Feversham, in Felix E. Schelling, editor, op. cit., pp. 36-78.

The play opens with the delivery to Arden by his friend, Franklin, of certain "letters patent from his Majesty" granting him all the lands of the Abbey of Feversham.⁴⁶ Uncheered by this good news, Arden explains that the cause of his drooping spirits is--

Arden. . . . foul objects that offend mine eyes!

* * *

Love-letters past 'twixt Mosbie and my wife,
And they have privy meetings in the town.⁴⁷

Thus the play begins with letters and the mention of letters, both of which reveal situations which eventually will lead to the tragedy. The transfer of the Abbey lands will cause the current tenant, Greene, to be dispossessed; the love affair with Mosbie will cause Arden's wife, Alice, to want him out of the way; both will, therefore, combine forces to murder him. Alice pretends wifely concern for her husband in the meantime, and when Arden departs on a business trip to London she urges him to write to her frequently, which he promises to do.

Alice has already promised Arden's serving man, Michael, that he may marry her maid, Susan, if he will murder his master after they get to London, but to make doubly sure she gives Greene money to hire assassins to do the job in the event Michael fails. Greene sends his first report back to Alice in a letter which he gives an innocent fellow townsman, Bradshaw, to deliver to her. The contents were brief: "We have missed of our purpose at London, but shall perform it by the way."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid., I, i, l. 4.

⁴⁷Ibid., I, i, ll. 12, 15-16.

⁴⁸Ibid., II, i, ll. 83-85; III, v, ll. 152-160.

These words would have had no meaning to Bradshaw, even if he had known them, but the simple act of carrying the letter will fatally involve him in the final tragedy.

The next letter provides a bit of comic relief and at the same time increases the danger to Arden. Michael has gone to a clerk in St. Paul's churchyard to have a letter written to Susan, and his master overhears him reading it.

Here enters ARDEN and FRANKLIN and hears
MICHAEL read this letter

'My duty remembered, Mistress Susan, hoping in God you be in good health, as I Michael was at the making hereof. This is to certify you that as the turtle true, when she hath lost her mate, sitteth alone, so I, mourning for your absence, do walk up and down Paul's till one day I fell asleep and lost my master's pantofles. Ah, Mistress Susan, abolish that paltry painter, cut him off by the shins with a frowning look of your crabbed countenance, and think upon Michael, who, drunk with the dregs of your favor, will cleave as fast to your love as a plaster of pitch to a galled horse-back. Thus hoping you will let my passions penetrate, or rather impetrate mercy of your meek hands, I end.

'Yours, Michael, or else not Michael.'

* * *

Arden. Where is the letter, sirrah? let me see it.

Then he gives him the letter

See, Master Franklin, here's proper stuff:

Susan my maid, the painter, and my man,

A crew of harlots, all in love, forsooth;

Sirrah, let me hear no more of this,

Nor for thy life once write to her a word. ⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., II, ii, 11. 3-21, 28-33.

This foolish letter, quite in keeping with the servant's stupidity, mentions another suitor for Susan's hand, but neither the jealous Michael nor his master knows that Alice has also promised the painter that he can have her maid if he will bring her some poison which she and Mosbie plan to give Arden if he gets safely home from London. The fact that Arden takes the letter and forbids Michael to write another one arouses his personal animosity against his master; although he had hesitated before, he is now ready to join in the plots against Arden not only to gain Susan as his reward, but also to vent his personal spite for such treatment.

Acts III and IV show a series of thrilling escapes rivaling those of the old "Perils of Pauline" cinema series. The assassins continue their attempts to kill Arden, but each time there seems to be no escape from them a chance meeting, a sudden squall, or a heavy fog occurs just in time to thwart his would-be murderers. The suspense is heightened by the fact that Michael, Susan, Mosbie, and even for a moment Greene, each has a temporary change of heart and wants to withdraw from the plot, but always they are pulled back into their tragic roles by the strength of Alice's overwhelming desire to be rid of the husband who stands between her and her lover. Arden remains serenely unconscious of his danger while fate continues to snatch him from the very jaws of violent death, until he appears protected by an invisible shield. Then the tower of accumulated suspense is toppled with dramatic suddenness as Alice and Mosbie join the hired assassins in Arden's murder.

When punishment is meted out for the crime, the guiltless fall with the guilty. Brought to justice and condemned, the innocent Bradshaw

appeals in vain to Alice for the testimony which could save him.

Brad. Mistress Arden, you are now going to God,
And I am by the law condemned to die
About a letter I brought from Master Greene.
I pray you, Mistress Arden, speak the truth:
Was I ever privy to your intent or no.

Alice. What should I say? You brought me such
a letter,

But I dare swear thou knewest not the contents.
Leave now to trouble me with worldly things . . .⁵⁰

The death of a guiltless man, whose only connection with the crime was the fact that he had carried a letter (its contents unknown to him) from one conspirator to another, contributes more terror and pity to the tragedy than the just punishment of guilty parties, sweeping and terrible though it was.

Thus letters both begin and end the tragic action, and throughout the play serve to carry forward the action and unite the three plots against Arden's life. Michael's letter, which is least important to the action, is the only one which reveals character, and that character is the foolish, bumbling one of an uneducated servant.

The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay⁵¹ by Robert Greene (1560?-1592) appears to have been first performed on December 26, 1589, which places it in the same year with Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, and one year after Marlowe's Dr. Faustus.

⁵⁰Ibid., V, v, ll. 2-9.

⁵¹Robert Greene, The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay in Charles Mills Gayley, editor, Representative English Comedies (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), I, 133-502.

Greene's play is a romantic but humorous, sometimes burlesque, treatment of a theme like Marlowe's, but familiar to the audience, and attractive because domestic. It may, indeed, be surmised that some scenes in Friar Bacon are parodies of their pompous analogues in Dr. Faustus. . . . [It] was acted with some frequency between 1591 and 1594, sometimes at important seasons, always with fair attendance, and occasionally with large profits. It was performed at court as late as 1602, and was occasionally revived under James I and Charles I.⁵²

Much of the play's popularity rested on its two principal themes: a contest of skill between scholars who delve in magic, and a courtship by proxy wherein the proxy suitor unwittingly wins for himself the love he is seeking on behalf of another. The arrangement of the play in the first quarto (1594) is in a series of sixteen scenes, with no indication of "acts" into which the scenes might have been grouped.

Edward, Prince of Wales, is enjoying his last bachelor days in the company of gay young nobles, all of them disguised as "frolicke courtiers" while hunting in the forests and mingling with commoners at country fairs. While thus engaged, the Prince has become enamored of fair Margaret, daughter of the inn-keeper of Fresingfield, but his suit for her affections has met with no success.

For why our countrie Margret is so coy,
And standes so much upon her honest pointes,
That marriage, or no market with the mayd.⁵³

Obviously the heir to the throne cannot marry a commoner, but Edward takes his jester's advice and rides off to Oxford to see if the

⁵²Charles Mills Gayley, editor, Critical Essay "Robert Greene" in Gayley, ed., op. cit., pp. 413-14, 426.

⁵³Greene, op. cit., Scene I, ll. 119-121.

famous Friar Bacon cannot provide some magic charm to cause the coy maid to yield, without marriage. In the meantime he sends his friend Ned Lacie, Earl of Lincoln, to do his courting for him.

Edward. . . . Lacie, send how she fares,
And spare no time nor cost to win her loves.

Lacie. I will, my lord, so execute this charge
As if that Lacie were in love with her.

Edward. Send letters speedily to Oxford of the neues.⁵⁴

Shortly thereafter Edward's father, Henry III, tells the visiting Emperor of Germany that he has received "packets" with news that the Prince has ridden with his lords--

To Oxford, in the academie there
To heare dispute amongst the learned men.
But we will send foorth letters for my songs,
To will him come from Oxford to the court.⁵⁵

The Emperor is accompanied by the King of Castile and the latter's daughter, Elinor, who as Prince Edward's prospective bride is eager to meet her future husband; he also has in his retinue a famous German scholar whose skill he would match with that of the scholars of Oxford; he suggests, therefore, that they all ride on to Oxford where both missions may be accomplished at once; thus the "packet" of letters serves to bring together the two main plots of the drama. In the contest which follows at Oxford, the German scholar displays remarkable gifts of magic only to be defeated by the even more fantastic skill of the English scholars, Friar Bungay and Friar Bacon, in a climax guaranteed to

⁵⁴Ibid., Scene I, ll. 152-156.

⁵⁵Ibid., Scene IV, ll. 37-40.

satisfy the most chauvinistic English audience.

Inasmuch as Prince Edward and Elinor of Castile in the meanwhile have fortunately found each other attractive and are formally betrothed, it would seem that the play has reached its conclusion at this point, and that Lacie's letter testing Margaret, which motivates the action of the remainder of the play, has been introduced merely to extend the performance to a suitable length. Professor Gayley has considered this criticism of the play's dramatic construction:

The pedant might find it easy to break this plot upon a wheel. . . . It may be that the climax is reached too soon. . . . The sham desertion exists merely because Greene was put to it, after his climax, to string out the romantic interest.⁵⁶

The dramatic impact of Lacie's letter to Margaret is heightened by the fact that the audience does not know that it is only a test, and shares Margaret's stunned dismay when she reads it.

Post. The Lincolne earle hath sent you letters here,
And, with them, just an hundred pounds in gold.
Sweete, bonny wench, read them, and make reply.
Margret. Tell me, whilst that I doe unrip the seales,
Lives Lacie well? how fares my lovely lord?

* * *

The letter and MARGRET reads it.

The bloomes of the Almond tree grow in a night, and vanish in a morne; the flies haemere, (Faire Peggie) take life with the Sun, and die with the dew; fancie that slippeth in with a gase, goeth out with a winke; and too timely loves have ever the shortest length. I write this as thy greife, and my folly, who at Frisingfield lov'd that which time hath taught me to be but meane dainties: eyes are dissemblers, and fancie is but queasie; therefore know, Margret, I have chosen a Spanish Ladie to be my wife, cheefe waighting woman to the Princesse Ellincour; a Lady faire, and no lesse faire than thy selfe, honorable and wealthy. In that I

⁵⁶Gayley, op. cit., p. 427.

forsake thee, I leave thee to thine own liking; and for thy dowie I have sent thee an hundred pounds; and ever assure thee of my favour, which shall availe thee and thine much. Farewell.

Not thine, nor his owne,
EDWARD LACIE.⁵⁷

The blasé words of this rude letter (whose abrupt dismissal is emphasized by the fact that it is written in prose), together with the gift of gold, are enough to try the temper of its recipient. If Margaret had been merely a cheap wench, she would have reacted with angry tears but would have accepted the gold. Her reaction, however, shows that she is indeed of better stuff than her station in life would suggest. With dignity she gives the postman the bag of gold and her reply:

Take thou, my friend, the hundred pound he sent;
For Margrets resolution craves no dower:

* * *

For I will straight to stately Fremingham,
And in the abby there be shorne a nun,
And yeld my loves and libertie to God.
Fellow, I give thee this, not for the newes,
For those be hatefull unto Marg^a/ret,
But for thart Lacies man, once Margrets love.⁵⁸

Succeeding scenes show Lacie, having tested Margaret's constancy, preparing to leave the court to fetch Margaret there for a joint wedding day with that of the Prince and Elinor of Castile; and Margaret, in nun's clothing, "Readie to be shorne in Fremingham." The suspense of the situation ends when Lacie arrives just in time to avert this final step before the taking of vows, and escorts her back to court where she rises to her newly exalted station in life with the same grace and dignity she had

⁵⁷Greene, op. cit., Scene X, ll. 114-116, 120-136.

⁵⁸Ibid., ll. 153-154, 157-162.

shown in her receipt of her earl's letter.

One finds in this play, then, examples of letters put to admirable use; first, the "packets" serve to unite the action of the two plots; secondly, Lacie's letter creates the dramatic impulse which keeps the play going, as it were, and provides the perfect opportunity for the revelation of the recipient's innate nobility of character.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), praised by Ben Jonson for his "mighty line," is considered the greatest figure, next to Shakespeare, in Elizabethan drama. His chronicle play, The Troublesome Reign of Edward the Second⁵⁹ "was acted, as the title page of the quartos declare, by the Earl of Pembroke's men, and probably first in 1591, or in the earlier months of 1592,"⁶⁰ which would place it just before Shakespeare's first chronicle plays, the Henry VI series. Marlowe may even have had a hand in those plays, for Shakespeare was associated with the Earl of Pembroke's company early in his career, "and the two young poets may have collaborated on the plays now known as the second and third parts of Henry VI."⁶¹

Marlowe was unquestionably the most gifted of the "university wits" who began to bring their gifts to the English drama in the 1580's. From him Shakespeare and his fellows learned many important lessons in play construction, the focusing of interest on a

⁵⁹ Christopher Marlowe, The Troublesome Reign of Edward the Second, in Schelling, op. cit., pp. 134-177.

⁶⁰ Schelling, op. cit., p. 133.

⁶¹ Alexander M. Witherspoon, editor, The College Survey of English Literature. Revised, shorter edition. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1951), p. 222.

single overpowering character, and, most significantly, the handling of blank verse.⁶²

In Edward II there are at least ten letters (in some instances, sets of letters), of which the first initiates the action of the play, and the last brings about the death of the King. A study of these letters reveals them as one of the principal means Marlowe has employed to achieve compression by bringing important off-stage events into the action by means of a few lines of correspondence read on-stage.

When Edward was a prince, his favorite follower had been banished by the king as being an evil influence on his son. Now the father is dead, and Edward's first act as King has been to recall the sycophant, Piers Gaveston. The action begins on a London street:

Enter GAVESTON, reading on a letter that
was brought him from the King

Gav. 'My father is deceased. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.'
Ah! words that make me surfeit with delight!
What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
Than live and be the favourite of a king!⁶³

In the opening lines of the play Marlowe, with magnificent economy, has revealed the infatuation of the King through the two lines of his letter; and the vaulting ambitions of the favorite, which are to prove fatal to them both, are foreshadowed in his reaction to the invitation.

In the second act, a Lady (daughter of the deceased Earl of Glou-

⁶²Ibid., p. 223.

⁶³Marlowe, op. cit., I, i, ll. 1-5.

cester and niece of the King) receives letters from Gaveston which protest his love for her, and from the King, bidding her to come to the court to meet Gaveston and prepare for her marriage. In the third act, Queen Isabella reports to the King on messages she has received that her brother, the King of France, has seized Normandy from the English. As in the preceding act, the actual letters are seen on the stage, and not only tell what is happening elsewhere, but also bring about the movement of persons and plot, in that they cause Edward to send his wife and son to France to represent him in efforts for peace.⁶⁴

Letters are used on stage in the fourth act, again to reveal important action elsewhere. Lord Arundel reads to the King a letter from the Lieutenant in charge of the Tower of London, reporting the escape of young Mortimer and others to France;⁶⁵ immediately thereafter the younger Spencer (newly created "Earl of Gloucester") reads to the King a letter he received from Levune, a Frenchman sent with money to bribe the French court to refuse the assistance Queen Isabella is seeking.

Spencer.

Reads the letter

'My duty to your honor premise, etc., I have, according to instructions in that behalf, dealt with the King of France his lords, and effected, that the queen, all discontented and discomforted, is gone; whither, if you ask, with Sir John of Hainault, brother to the marquis, into Flanders. With them are gone Lord Edmund, and the Lord Mortimer, having in their company divers of your nation, and others; and, as constant report goeth, they intend to give King Edward battle in Eng-

⁶⁴Ibid., II, i, ll. 59-60; III, ii, ll. 58-73.

⁶⁵Ibid., IV, iii, ll. 7-20.

land, sooner than he can look for them.

This is all the news of import.

Your honor's in all service, LEVUNE.⁶⁶

This letter is quoted in full because it illustrates what may be designated as the "factual report" type of letter; such a letter need not reveal character, but it does either command or report off-stage military or diplomatic events important to the unfolding of the plot. There is a series of similar letters in the last act, as Edward, now deposed and a prisoner, is moved from place to place to prevent his rescue. Lord Berkeley receives a letter from Mortimer giving him, instead of Leicester, custody of the former King; the Queen receives letters from Leicester that the King has indeed abdicated; and Mortimer sends a letter to Berkeley ordering him to surrender Edward to a pair of villains, Matrevis and Gurney.⁶⁷

The last letter in the play is diabolically clever. Mortimer is shown reading the letter he has prepared to be sent to the King's jailers by a third villain, Lightborn, who has verbal orders to kill the King.

Mor. The king must die, or Mortimer goes down;
The commons now begin to pity him:
Yet he that is the cause of Edward's death,
Is sure to pay for it when his son's of age;
And therefore will I do it cunningly.
This letter, written by a friend of ours,
Contains his death, yet bids them save his life.
"Edwardum occidere nolite timere, bonum est.
Fear not to kill the king, 'tis good he die."

⁶⁶ Ibid., IV, 111, ll. 28-42.

⁶⁷ Ibid., V, 1, ll. 128-140; 11, ll. 23-29, and 46-50.

But read it thus, and that's another sense:
"Edwardum occidere nolite, timere bonum est.
 Kill not the king, 'tis good to fear the worst."
 Unpointed as it is, thus shall it go,
 That, being dead, if it chance to be found,
 Matrevis and the rest may bear the blame,
 And we be quit that caused it to be done.
 Within this room is locked the messenger
 That shall convey it, and perform the rest:
 And by a secret token that he bears,
 Shall he be murdered when the deed is done.--
 Lightborn, come forth!⁶⁸

Lightborn takes the message to Berkeley Castle and presents it to Matrevis and Gurney, who read it as Mortimer had planned they should, "Edwardum occidere nolite timere" (Fear not to kill the king), and help him to murder Edward. They then kill him because the token he carried bore the message "Pereat iste!" (This man perishes!)

In the closing scene, the newly crowned Edward III produces the double entendre letter, brought to him by the repentant Gurney; he forces Mortimer to admit it is in his handwriting, and sentences him to death.

In summary, Marlowe used ten letters in the action of the play, of which the first and last are most important. The first both reveals character and initiates the action; the last reveals character and brings the action to a close, and has an added interest per se because of its cleverness. The letters as a whole compress action, produce a total stage effect of the many-sided business of civil and military authority, and enhance the atmosphere of intrigue and tragedy.

⁶⁸ Ibid., V, iv, ll. 1-21.

In addition to the four plays considered above, there are other tragedies and comedies by Shakespeare's contemporaries in which letters are used as a dramatic device. These include Bussy d'Ambois (1607), a pseudo-historical tragedy by George Chapman (ca. 1559-1634), Everyman in His Humour (1598), a Plautine comedy of humours, and Sejanus His Fall (1603), a Roman tragedy, both by Ben Jonson (ca. 1573-1637), and A Woman Killed with Kindness (ca. 1603), a domestic tragedy by Thomas Heywood (ca. 1573-ca. 1641). A detailed analysis of the use of letters in these plays seems unnecessary here, inasmuch as they do not contain any types of letters or particular dramatic uses of them which are notably different from those in the English plays already analyzed in this section.

In general, the letters used in the plays of the University Wits show a marked advance when compared with those of their immediate predecessors. They are less like a merely convenient dramatic device, and they carry more weight, as it were, in themselves. Bel-imperia's note to Hieronimo does not simply tell him who murdered his son; it is an impassioned cry, fairly dripping with blood, for revenge; Lacie's letter to Margaret does not simply reject her, but does so in language which is doubly calculated to offend by its very gentlemanly condescension. The letter as a dramatic device first used by the Greeks, used more frequently by the Romans, and transmitted by the early Renaissance dramatists, became in the hands of Shakespeare's early contemporaries a subtle, living instrument for the hands of the master playwright.

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF LETTERS

With the preliminary background completed, attention can now be turned to a study of Shakespeare's use of letters in twelve representative plays, with specific reference to the following questions:

- (1) In what ways was his use of letters influenced by preceding and contemporary dramatists?
- (2) In what ways, if any, does his use of letters show superior dramatic skill?
- (3) In what ways does a chronological study of his use of letters reveal Shakespeare's own development as a dramatist?

Only two of Shakespeare's plays, Love's Labor Lost and The Tempest, have original plots; in all of the others he based his play on an identifiable source or combination of sources--early drama, history, legend, tale, or romance. Wherever possible, therefore, consideration must be given to the use of letters in his sources, in order to determine the manner in which Shakespeare's use of letters in each play demonstrates his own, rather than borrowed, technique.

I. "IN THE WORKSHOP," 1590-95

In view of Udall's use of letters in his farce Roister Doister, it would have been interesting to start this part of this study with an early farce by Shakespeare. His Comedy of Errors (1591-92) is one, but without letters, and his earliest comedy, Love's Labor Lost (1590-93), also contains no letters.

The first of Shakespeare's plays to employ letters as a dramatic device is Two Gentlemen of Verona (ca. 1594-95),⁶⁹ an early comedy. Its theme, according to Bullough, is "the conflict between the duties of love and friendship."⁷⁰ The major source of the plot appears to have been the Story of the Shepherdess Felismena in Diana Enamoranda (1542) by the Portuguese poet and novelist Jorge de Montemayer. An English translation by Bartholomew Yonge in 1583 circulated in manuscript form prior to its publication in 1598. The tale also appears to have been dramatized in English in 1584, because a lost play entitled the History of Felix and Philomena was performed that year in Greenwich.

Letters are prominent in Montemayer's romance and will be compared with those in Shakespeare's play as it is analyzed.

Valentine, a gentleman of Verona, tries to persuade his friend Proteus to accompany him to Milan to seek his fortune, but Proteus refuses to leave Julia, whom he is courting. The two friends promise to

⁶⁹ Shakespeare, op. cit., Two Gentlemen of Verona, pp. 26-50.

⁷⁰ Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (5 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), I, 203.

keep in touch by letters.

Val. To Milan let me hear from thee by letters
Of thy success in love, and what news else
Betideth here in absence of thy friend;
And I likewise will visit thee with mine.⁷¹

Proteus asks Speed (Valentine's servant) if a letter from him to Julia has been delivered and how she appeared to react to it.

Pro. . . . gavest thou my letter to Julia?

Speed. Ay, sir; . . .

* * *

Pro. What said she? nothing?

Speed. No, not so much as 'Take this for thy pains.'

Exit SPEED.

Pro. I must go send some better messenger;
I fear my Julia would not deign my lines,⁷²
Receiving them from such a worthless post.

Speed had actually delivered the letter to Julia's maid, Lucetta. Julia berates her maid for accepting it, refuses to read it, and sends her away with it; then calls her back for it, finally changes her mind again and tears it up. When she dismisses the maid again, however, Julia picks up the pieces of the letter, tries to read it, and kisses it!⁷³

In Shakespeare's source, Montemayer's Don Felix himself gives his letter addressed to Felismena to her maid Rosina for delivery. The lady, like Julia, angrily rejects it at first, but on the following day asks the maid to return it, reads it, and writes a circumspect reply.⁷⁴ Both

⁷¹Shakespeare, op. cit., Two Gentlemen of Verona, I, 1, ll. 57-60.

⁷²Ibid., I, 1, ll. 99-100, 152-154, 161-163.

⁷³Ibid., I, ii.

⁷⁴Jorge de Montemayer, Diana Enamoranda, in Bullough, op. cit., pp. 230-232.

heroines exhibit the struggle between curiosity and convention in an impulsive but proper young lady, but Shakespeare's picture of Julia gathering up the torn pieces provides a sympathetic touch of realism and charm. Shakespeare's dramatic economy is shown, too, by his declining to reproduce any part of Don Felix's 170-word conventional letter or Felismena's 210-word equally conventional answer. An Elizabethan audience could be expected to understand the contents of traditional courtly correspondence under the circumstances. Julia's action in kissing the pieces of the letter is a more dramatically eloquent response than a 200-word answer. Montemayer adds that thereafter "amorous letters and verses were re-continued on both sides," and supplies three of the poems.⁷⁵ Shakespeare has brought his lovers together and is ready to go on with the action of his play without further ado.

Proteus is rhapsodizing over a letter from his Julia when his father, Don Antonio, unexpectedly appears.

- Pro. Sweet love! sweet lines! sweet life!
 Here is her hand, the agent of her heart;
 Here is her oath for love, her honour's pawn.
 O, that our fathers would applaud our loves,
 To seal our happiness with their consents!
 O heavenly Julia!
- Ant. How now! what letter are you reading there?
- Pro. May't please your lordship, 't is a word or two
 Of commendations sent from Valentine,
 Deliver'd by a friend that came from him.
- Ant. Lend me the letter; let me see what news.
- Pro. There is no news, my lord, but that he writes
 How happily he lives, how well belov'd
 And daily graced by the emperor;
 Wishing me with him, partner of his fortune.

* * *

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 232-236.

Ant. My will is something sorted with his wish.
Mute not that I thus suddenly proceed;

* * *

To-morrow be in readiness to go.

* * *

Exeunt ANTONIO and PANTHINO.

Pro. Thus have I shunn'd the fire for fear of burning.
And drench'd me in the sea, where I am drown'd.
I fear'd to show my father Julia's letter,
Lest he should take exceptions to my love;
And with the vantage of mine own excuse
Hath he excepted most against my love.

* * *

Why, this it is: my heart accords thereto,
And yet a thousand times it answers, 'no.'⁷⁶

Julia's letter does not advance the action of the play, but it does provide several vivid touches of characterization. The loving spirit of her letter is more dramatically suggested by Proteus' exuberant reaction to it than an actual reading of its contents would convey; Shakespeare is making effective use of the more intense power of imagination. Proteus seems too volatile to prove a steady lover, and his too, too facile tongue automatically takes the easy way out of one unexpected predicament, only to get him into another. The fact that he is not entirely unhappy to go to Milan also does not bode well for the strength of his love for Julia, any more than his failure to acknowledge her letter does for his strength of character.

In Milan, Valentine tells his servant Speed about a letter-writing chore the beautiful Silvia has assigned him.

Val. Last night she enjoined me to write some lines
to one she loves.

Speed. And have you?

Val. I have.

⁷⁶Shakespeare, *op. cit.*, Two Gentlemen of Verona, I, iii, ll. 45-60, 63-64, 70, 78-83, 90-91.

Speed. Are they not lamely writ?

Val. No, boy, but as well as I can do them.--Peace!
here she comes.

(Enter SILVIA)

* * *

As you enjoin'd me, I have writ your letter
Unto the secret nameless friend of yours;
Which I was much unwilling to proceed in
But for my duty to your ladyship. Gives a letter.

Sil. I thank you, gentle servant. 'Tis very clerkly done.

Val. Now trust me, madam, it came hardly off;
For, being ignorant to whom it goes,
I writ at random, very doubtfully.

Sil. Perchance you think too much of so much pains?

* * *

. . . the lines are very quaintly writ,
But since unwillingly, take them again.
Nay, take them.

Gives back the letter.

Val. Madam, they are for you.

Sil. Ay, ay: you writ them, sir, at my request,
But I will none of them; they are for you.
I would have had them writ more movingly.

Val. Please you, I'll write your ladyship another.

* * *

Sil. Why, if it please you, take it for your labour.
And so, good morrow, servant.

Exit.

Speed. O jest unseen, inscrutable, invisible,
As a nose on a man's face, or a weathercock on a steeple!
My master sues to her, and she hath taught her suitor,
He being her pupil, to become her tutor.
O excellent device! was there ever heard a better,
That my master, being scribe, to himself should write
the letter?⁷⁷

Speed has instantly seen through Silvia's coy, teasing ruse, but try as hard as he may, he can not get Valentine to understand the letter "racket." In this entertaining dialogue about letters Shakespeare has exquisitely delineated and contrasted the feminine wiles of the clever young lady, the stolid loyalty of her obtuse suitor, the keen observation

⁷⁷Ibid., II, 1, ll. 97-103, 114-123, 133-139, 143-150.

and quick wit of the servant--all essentially stock characters who begin to "act like human beings" in this gay bit of persiflage.

Because Silvia loves Valentine she spurns Thurio, the suitor favored by her father, the Duke. While courting the lady, the two rivals are sparring at each other when the Duke enters with some good news.

Duke. Now, daughter Silvia, you are hard beset.--
Sir Valentine, your father's in good health;
What say you to a letter from your friends
Of much good news?

Val. My lord, I will be thankful
To any happy messenger from thence.⁷⁸

The Duke pleasantly builds up a bit of suspense by asking Valentine if he knows Don Antonio's son, to which the young man replies that they have been the closest of friends from infancy, and proceeds to praise Proteus generously. The Duke springs his happy surprise:

Duke. Well, sir, this gentleman is come to me,
With commendation from great potentates,
And here he means to spend his time awhile;
I think 'tis no unwelcome news to you.
Val. Should I have wish'd a thing, it had been he.⁷⁹

A lesser dramatist might have had the Duke either read the letter saying Proteus was coming, or have simply told Valentine, "I have good news for you; your friend is coming here." But Shakespeare employs a pleasant touch of the dramatic even in this otherwise routine announcement, and in doing so portrays an affable gentleman who teases his daughter a bit, plays a kindly "guess who?" game with their young guest, and seems to enjoy his happy little surprise. The incident is used,

⁷⁸Ibid., II, iv, ll. 50-54.

⁷⁹Ibid., ll. 79-83.

too, to allow Valentine spontaneously to express his loyal enthusiasm for the dear friend about whom he had already spoken to Silvia.

Val. This is the gentleman I told your ladyship
Had come along with me, but that his mistress⁸⁰
Did hold his eyes lock'd in her crystal looks.

Proteus arrives and the loyal, trusting Valentine proudly presents him to Silvia. Palamon and Arcite might have questioned his naiveté, because Proteus promptly also falls in love with her, apparently forgetting Julia's "crystal looks!"

As soon as they are alone, Valentine tells Proteus that he and Silvia plan to elope, using a rope ladder for her get-away. When Valentine departs to complete his preparations, the fickle Proteus admits to himself that his "love at first sight" of Silvia has already overcome his love for Julia and his friend. Eventually he decides Valentine must be removed if he hopes to win her himself, and reveals the elopement plan to her father so that he may prevent it. A chance meeting on the street soon gives the Duke his opportunity.

Duke. Sir Valentine, whither away so fast?

Val. Please it your grace, there is a messenger
That stays to bear my letters to my friends,
And I am going to deliver them.⁸¹

Valentine's pretense does not fool the artful Duke, however, who detains him under the pretext that he needs his advice as to how to manage a visit to a lady whom he secretly loves, but who is shut up in a

⁸⁰ Ibid., ll. 88-90.

⁸¹ Ibid., III, 1, ll. 51-54.

high chamber because she is betrothed to a younger man. Valentine explains how he should use a rope ladder, concealed under a cloak like his!

Duke. How shall I fashion me to wear a cloak?

I pray thee, let me feel thy cloak upon me.

Fulls open VALENTINE'S cloak.

What letter is this same? What's here? 'To Silvia!'

And here an engine ladder fit for my proceeding.

I'll be so bold to break the seal for once.

Reads 'My thoughts do harbour with my Silvia nightly,

And slaves they are to me that send them flying.

O, could their master come and go as lightly,

Himself would lodge where senseless they are lying!

My herald thoughts in thy pure bosom rest them;

While I, their king, that hither them importune,

Do curse the grace that with such grace hath bless'd them,

Because myself do want my servants' fortune.

I curse myself, for they are sent by me,

That they should harbour where their lord would be.'

What's here?

'Silvia, this night I will enfranchise thee.'

'Tis so; and here's the ladder for the purpose.⁸²

The Duke berates Valentine and banishes him at once.

For a second time Shakespeare has used the clever Duke to dramatize a letter episode. The wording of the letter itself merely reveals the effort of a not very gifted young lover to endite a conventional sonnet to his mistress--but its postscript and the rope ladder leave Valentine defenseless. It is a scene sure to delight an audience as they watch the cunning old spider spin his web and the hapless young fly blunder right into it.

As the banished Valentine flees the city, his false friend offers to handle his correspondence for him:

Pro. Thy letters may be here, though thou art hence,

⁸² Ibid., ll. 135-152.

Which, being writ to me, shall be deliver'd
Even in the milk-white bosom of thy love.⁸³

Shortly thereafter Proteus gains the Duke's permission to visit Silvia by promising to use the opportunity to further the suit of Don Thurio.

In the meantime, the deserted Julia, disguised as a boy, has followed her faithless lover to Milan. An inn keeper guides her to the court of the palace to hear musicians employed by Thurio (at Proteus' suggestion) serenade Silvia. Silvia comes to her window to thank the musicians, Proteus protests his own love for her, and when she reproves him for his faithlessness to his friend and to his former lady love, he claims that both Valentine and Julia are dead. All of this the unhappy Julia overhears. The next day, as "Sebastian," she gets herself employed as a page by Proteus, who sends her to deliver a ring (the very one she herself had given him) and a letter to Silvia.

Jul. Madam, please you peruse this letter.--
* * *

Sil. There, hold!
I will not look upon your master's lines;
I know they are stuff'd with protestations
And full of new-found oaths, which he will break
As easily as I do tear his paper.⁸⁴

Silvia tears up the letter, unread, and rejects the ring.

In Shakespeare's source, Montemayor's Diana Enamoranda, Don Felix's father sends his son to a distant court in order to separate him from Felismena. She, like Shakespeare's Julia, follows later, disguised as a boy, and her inn keeper takes her to hear music which turns

⁸³Ibid., II. 249-251.

⁸⁴Ibid., IV, iv, II. 128, 134-138.

out to be Don Felix himself serenading his new love, Celia.

Celia does not, however, appear on her balcony to reprove Don Felix for his faithlessness to a former love. Felismena hears that about a month later when Don Felix, who has employed her as the page "Valerius," reads her a letter of stately scorn from Celia:

And (disloyall) he, pulling a letter out of his bosome, which he had received the same hower from his Mistresse, reade it unto me, thinking he did me a great favour thereby, the contents whereof were these:

Celias letter to Don Felix

Never any thing that I suspected, touching thy love, hath beene so farre from the truth, that hath not given me occasion to beleeve more often mine owne imagination then thy innocencie; wherein, if I do thee any wrong, referre it but to the censure of thine owne follie. For well thou mightest have denied, or not declared thy passed love, without giving me occasion to condemne thee by thine owne confession. Thou saiest I was the cause that made thee forget thy former love. Comfort thy selfe, for there shall not want another to make thee forget thy second. And assure thy selfe of this (Lord Don Felix) that there is not any thing more unbecoming a Gentleman, then to finde an occasion in a Gentlewoman to leese himselfe for her love. I will saie no more, but that in an ill, where there is no remedie, the best is not to seeke out any.⁸⁵

Felismena delivers Don Felix's rather long contrived letter of response to Celia, which she receives coldly but is persuaded by Felismena to answer.

In Montemayer's tale both Celia's letter and Don Felix's reply are read aloud by him to Felismena for her opinion, and Shakespeare might naturally have had his corresponding actors do the same. Instead he achieves economy and emphasis by having Silvia castigate Proteus, in person, and eloquently; and the hidden Julia, seeing and hearing every-

⁸⁵Montemayer, in Bullough, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

thing, moans:

. . . it hath been the longest night
That e'er I watch'd, and the most heaviest. ⁸⁶

Shakespeare employs greater economy also in his handling of the letters of the two gentlemen. Montemayer discloses the contents of Don Felix's letter, and when it is delivered, Celia is persuaded not only not to reject it, but even to reply. Shakespeare does not have to give us the contents of Proteus' letter; Silvia knows it is "stuffed with protestations" and promptly tears it up.

It would appear that no matter how closely Shakespeare may follow the plot of his source he is independent in his use of letters, that at times he uses the power of suggestion as a stronger and more economic device instead of giving a letter verbatim, and that he increases the dramatic effectiveness of his letters by the way in which he introduces them.

The second of Shakespeare's plays to be considered in this study is The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet ⁸⁷ (ca. 1594-95), generally classified as an early or a romantic tragedy.

The story of Romeo and Juliet was well known, and had been told in Italian, French, and English; but the play was based on an English poem by Arthur Brooke called The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet, printed in 1562. Brooke stated in his preface, "I saw the same argument lately set forth on stage with more commendation

⁸⁶Shakespeare, op. cit., Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV, ii, ll. 142-143.

⁸⁷Shakespeare, op. cit., The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, pp. 882-918.

than I can look for," and it is probable that there were other stage versions between 1562 and 1595.⁸⁸

Brooke's version, a poem of over 3,000 lines, is given in full by Bullough.⁸⁹ Early in his poem Brooke mentions letters sent by Romeus to his first love, not named by Brooke, but Rosaline in Shakespeare's play. Brooke describes how much in love Romeus is:

Whose beauty, shape, and comely grace, did so his heart entrappe,
That from his owne affayres, his thought she did remove,
Onely he sought to honor her, to serve her, and to love.
To her he writeth oft, oft messengers are sent;⁹⁰

We do not know how Romeus expressed himself in these letters, but we do know what Shakespeare's Romeo says because he praises Rosaline to his cousin Benvolio and bewails her indifference,⁹¹ presenting a lively, amusing portrayal of a fashionable young man "in love with love" in spite of his groans.

Shakespeare, in turn, mentions a letter which Brooke does not. Romeo's friend Mercutio is informed by Benvolio of a letter sent to Romeo by Juliet's cousin Tybalt, who was furious that a Montague had dared to come to a Capulet party.

Ben. Tybalt, the kinsman of old Capulet,
Hath sent a letter to his father's house.
Mer. A challenge, on my life.

⁸⁸G. B. Harrison, "Introduction" to The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare, Shakespeare Major Plays and the Sonnets, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948), p. 226.

⁸⁹Bullough, op. cit., I, 284-363.

⁹⁰Arthur Brooke, The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet, in Bullough, op. cit., ll. 58-61.

⁹¹Shakespeare, op. cit., . . . Romeo and Juliet, I, i, ll. 168-243.

Ben. Romeo will answer it.

Mer. Any man that can write may answer a letter.

Ben. Nay, he will answer the letter's master, how he dares, being dared.⁹²

This letter does not further the action of the play because Romeo would not duel with his new lady's kinsman, but it does serve to establish audience suspense that the antagonism of the two houses must lead to tragedy involving Romeo.

The non-delivery of Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo provides the climax of the drama, and in this Shakespeare followed closely the facts given in his source.

Brooke's account is more compact than most of his poem; it is a stark series of fateful events unbroken by his usual poetical digressions.

Our fryer Lawrence hath by this, sent one to Romeus,
A frier of his house, there never was a better,
He trusted him even as himselfe, to whom he gave a letter,
In which, he written had, of every thing at length,
That past twixt Juliet and him, and of the powders strength;
The next night after that, he willeth him to come
To helpe to take his Juliet out of the hollow toombe,
For by that time, the drinke, he saith, will cease to woorke,
And for one night his wife and he within his cell shall loorke.
Then shall he cary her to Mantua away,
(Till fickle Fortune favour him) disguise in mans aray.

Thys letter closde he sendes to Romeus by his brother:
He chargeth him that in no case he geve it any other.
Apace our frier John to Mantua him hies,
And, for because in Italy it is a wonted guise,
That friers in the towne should seeldome walke alone,
But of theyr covent ay should be accompanide with one
Of his profession, straight a house he fyndeth out,
In mynde to take some frier with him, to walke the towne about.

⁹²Ibid., II, iv, ll. 6-12.

But entred once, he might not issue out agayne,
 For that a brother of the house, a day before or twayne,
 Dyed of the plague (a sickenes which they greatly feare and hate)
 So were the brethren charged to kepe within theyr covent gate,

* * *

The fryer by this restraint, beset with dred and sorow,
 Not knowing what the letters held, differd untill the morowe,
 And then he thought in tyme to send to Romeus.⁹³

In the poem Friar John does not report the failure of his mission, but goes on when permitted to Mantua, leaving Friar Lawrence uncertain of what has happened.

The fryer that knew what time the powder had been taken,
 Knew eke the very instant when the sleper should awaken,
 But wondring that he could no kind of auswer heare,
 Of letters, which to Romeus his fellow fryer did beare,
 Out of saint Frauncis church hymselfe alone dyd fare,
 And for the opening of the tombe, meete instrumentes he bare.⁹⁴

Shakespeare has Friar Lawrence tell Juliet his plan to send the letter to Romeo:

Fri. L. In the meantime, against thou shalt awake,
 Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift,
 And hither shall he come, and he and I
 Will watch thy waking,

* * *

. . . I'll send a friar with speed
 To Mantua, with my letters to thy lord.⁹⁵

His Friar John turns back and explains the failure of his mission, which dramatically increases the fear of Friar Lawrence as he hastens to the tomb.

Fri. L. Welcome from Mantua. What says Romeo?
 Or if his mind be writ, give me his letter.

* * *

⁹³Brooke, op. cit., ll. 2474-2496, 2501-2503.

⁹⁴Ibid., ll. 2689-2694.

⁹⁵Shakespeare, op. cit., . . . Romeo and Juliet, IV, i, ll. 113-116, 123-124.

Fri. J. . . . the searchers of the town,
 Suspecting that we both were in a house
 Where the infectious pestilence did reign,
 Sealed up the doors and would not let us forth,
 So that my speed to Mantua there was stayed.
Fri. L. Who bare my letter, then, to Romeo?
Fri. J. I could not send it--here it is again--

* * *

Fri. L. Unhappy fortune! . . .

* * *

Now must I to the monument alone. 96
 Within this three hours will fair Juliet wake.

His uneasiness is shown in action as well as words, as he hastens to the tomb:

Fri. L. Saint Francis, be my speed! How oft tonight
 Have my old feet stumbled at graves! 97

The fact that he knows Romeo has not received his letter increases his trembling to terror when Romeo's servant informs him Romeo has been in the vault for a half-hour.

Fri. L. . . . Fear comes upon me-- 98
 Oh, much I fear some ill unlucky thing.

Brooke and Shakespeare both make Romeo's manservant the messenger of Juliet's funeral, but Shakespeare adds a dramatic touch of pathos to Romeo's grief, when hoping against hope he still asks his servant a second time:

Rom. Hast thou no letters to me from the Friar? 99

⁹⁶Ibid., V, ii, ll. 3-4, 8-14, 17, 23-24.

⁹⁷Ibid., V, iii, ll. 121-122.

⁹⁸Ibid., ll. 135-136.

⁹⁹Ibid., V, i, l. 31.

Shakespeare follows his source in having Romeo write a farewell letter to be delivered after his death to his father. Brooke tells its contents while Romeus is writing it before he leaves Mantua; Shakespeare leaves his audience to imagine its contents when his Romeo gives the letter to his servant just before entering Juliet's tomb:

Rom. Hold, take this letter. Early in the morning
See thou deliver it to my lord and father.¹⁰⁰

The letter is produced by the servant at the end of both the poem and the play. In the poem, it is needed as evidence in defense of Friar Lawrence and of Romeus' servant at their trial on charges of having murdered the lovers, and is the basis of their acquittal, the execution of the apothecary, and the banishment of Juliet's nurse.¹⁰¹ The account of the trial, which takes place the day after the death scene, adds almost 2,000 lines to the poem after the actual deaths in the tomb, and is almost wholly a re-telling of the story. In the play the closing scene takes place in the graveyard where the Capulets and Montagues have been summoned by the Night Watch immediately after they discover the bodies, the servant produces the letter which he had been told to deliver in the morning, which simply confirms the Friar's report, and the action requires only 130 lines.¹⁰² Where Brooke's emphasis on Romeo's last letter weakens the tragic ending, Shakespeare's economy in lessening its

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., V, iii, ll. 23-24.

¹⁰¹ Brooke, op. cit., ll. 2805-3000.

¹⁰² Shakespeare, op. cit., . . . Romeo and Juliet, V, iii, ll. 180-

importance allows the tragedy of the "star-crossed lovers" to close with undiminished dramatic impact.

Some of the differences between Shakespeare and his source in their handling of correspondence is of course due to their media. In this case, however, Shakespeare reveals his skill in selecting from the elements of a long narrative poem only those with the most dramatic importance and impact; his tragedy is not weakened by unnecessary use of letters.

II. "IN THE WORLD," 1595-1600

Of the ten plays generally believed to have been written by Shakespeare in his experimental period ("In the Workshop"), seven had been chronicle or history plays which were probably revisions of earlier plays or written in collaboration with Peele, Greene, or Marlowe. The first history play which he wrote as an independent, mature dramatist in this next period of his development was The First Part of King Henry the Fourth (ca. 1597),¹⁰³ which for the purpose of brevity will be designated as I Henry IV hereinafter.

This play is based chiefly on Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1577), although some elements of the comic sub-plot were suggested by an early chronicle play, The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, which was popular in London before

¹⁰³Shakespeare, op. cit., The First Part of King Henry the Fourth, pp. 470-503.

1588.¹⁰⁴ In this play there are four references to messages, but apparently they were all oral; the only written documents were the terms of a proposed peace after Agincourt,¹⁰⁵ an action which does not take place in Shakespeare until his Henry V.

In the sections of Holinshed's Chronicles which Shakespeare used for I Henry IV, two instances are related which may have implied either oral or written messages; the first of these is:

. . . the King did at divers and sundry times require deliverance of the residue [of prisoners held by the Percies], and that with great threatenings, . . .¹⁰⁶

In the play this action takes place in a dramatic personal confrontation between the King and the Percies.¹⁰⁷

The second instance in the Chronicles which may have involved either written or oral reports refers to the reasons for the King's anger with Prince Hal:

. . . upon a vehement conceit of unkindness sprung in the father, [the Prince] was in a way to be worn out of favor. Which was the more likely to come to pass by their informations that privily charged him with riot and other uncivil demeanor unseemly for a Prince.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, in Six Old Plays on Which Shakespeare Founded His Measure for Measure . Comedy of Errors . Taming the Shrew . King John . K. Henry IV . and K. Henry V . King Lear . 2 vols. (London: Printed for S. Leacroft, Charing-Cross, MDCCLXXIX), II, 317-375.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 367-368. This play is not divided into acts and scenes, and the lines are not numbered.

¹⁰⁶ Raphael Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, quoted in Harrison, "Introduction" to Henry IV, Part I, in Shakespeare, op. cit., pp. 333-334.

¹⁰⁷ Shakespeare, op. cit., I Henry IV, I, iii, ll. 1-124.

¹⁰⁸ Holinshed, Chronicles . . . , quoted in Harrison, op. cit., p. 334.

In only one place does Holinshed state that letters were written and sent:

The Prince (sore offended with . . . slanderous reports . . .) wrote his letters into every part of the realm, to reprove all such slanderous devices of those that sought his discredit.¹⁰⁹

Shakespeare makes no use of either the implied or actual letters in his sources; the three letters read or paraphrased in I Henry IV, and the appearance of four or more other letters, are all original with him. So also is the first reference to a letter, which is a promise by Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, to send letters to his nephew, Hotspur, in connection with their plans to enlist allies in their plot against the King.

Wor. . . . make the Douglas' son your only mean
For powers in Scotland; which, for divers reasons
Which I shall send you written, be assur'd,
Will easily be granted.¹¹⁰

Since there is no further reference to these letters in the play, their purpose appears to be the portrayal of Worcester as one of the prime movers of the Percy conspiracy.

The next letter is from an unidentified conspirator to Hotspur, and is important for several reasons. The fact that the writer is withdrawing from the conspiracy and gives his reasons for doing so foreshadows the nature of the troubles ahead for the Percies; Hotspur's factual comments while he reads the letter summarize off-stage events to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Shakespeare, op. cit., I Henry IV, I, iii, ll. 261-264.

date, and his emotional reactions superbly portray the characteristics which earned him his nickname.

Enter HOTSPUR alone, reading a letter.

But for mine own part, my lord, I could be well contented to be there, in respect of the love I bear your house.

He could be contented; why is he not then? In respect of the love he bears our house: he shows in this he loves his own barn better than he loves our house. Let me see some more.

The purpose you undertake is dangerous;--

Why, that's certain: 'tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.

The purpose you undertake is dangerous; the friends you have named uncertain; the time itself unsorted; and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition.

Say you so, say you so? I say unto you again, You are a cowardly hine, and you lie. What a lack-brain is this! By the Lord, our plot is a good plot as ever was laid; our friends true and constant: a good plot, good friends, and full of expectation; an excellent plot, very good friends.

* * *

Is there not my father, my uncle, and myself? Lord Edmund Mortimer, my Lord of York, and Owen Glendower? Is there not besides the Douglas? Have I not all their letters to meet me in arms by the ninth of the next month, and are they not some of them set forward already? What a pagan rascal is this! an infidel! Ha! you shall see now in very sincerity of fear and cold heart, will he to the king and lay open our proceedings. O! I could divide myself and go to buffets, for moving such a dish of skim milk with so honorable an action. Hang him! let him tell the king; we are prepared. I will set forward to-night.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ibid., II, iii, ll. 1-23, 27-40.

The sober nature of the letter could have caused a more thoughtful recipient to pause and consider just which friends might prove "uncertain," and if the time were indeed badly chosen and the forces insufficient for the action planned. Hotspur, however, is angry, brave, rash, loyal, and defiant--and incautious; only his realization that the writer of the letter may well prove an informer to the King shows any application of thought to its contents. Shakespeare has used this letter scene to portray, not the conventional, rather wooden hero or villain of the chronicle plays of his predecessors, but a living portrait of a temperamental, vainglorious young man who wins our sympathies in spite of the fact that he is a traitor. This picture is not drawn by means of statements describing Hotspur's character, but by his own actions and reactions, which is the way in which Aristotle said character should be portrayed in drama, and the device used for this dramatic portrayal is the letter.

The next letters are two which Prince Hal has written for Bardolph to deliver:

Prince. Go bear this letter to Lord John of Lancaster,
To my brother John; this to my Lord of Westmoreland.
Go, Poins, to horse, to horse! for thou and I
Have thirty miles to ride e'er dinner-time.
Jack, meet me tomorrow in the Temple-hall
At two o'clock . . . 112

This scene shows the dramatic change which the challenge to the throne has brought about in Hal. He is no longer the gay playfellow, dissipating his energies and talents in taproom pranks; he is suddenly the swift, keen

¹¹²Ibid., III, iii, ll. 217-222.

man of action, planning his campaign, dispatching military letters, and issuing terse commands. The contents of the letters are not important, but the manner of their sending shows the new "image" of the Prince.

As the forces of the conspirators gather, a messenger brings Hotspur a letter of grave importance to their cause.

Mess. These letters come from your father.

Hot. Letters from him! why comes he not himself?

Mess. He cannot come, my lord: he's grievous sick.

Hot. 'Zounds! how has he the leisure to be sick
In such a justling time? . . .

* * *

He writes me here, that inward sickness--
And that his friends by deputation could not
So soon be drawn; nor did he think it meet
To lay so dangerous and dear a trust
On any soul remov'd but on his own.
Yet doth he give us bold advertisement,
That with our small conjunction we should on,
To see how fortune is dispos'd to us;
For, as he writes, there is no quailing now,
Because the king is certainly possess'd
Of all our purposes. What say you to it?¹¹³

This last question is asked of the Earl of Worcester, who replies with no constructive advice--only fears of the effect of the Earl's absence on public opinion and on the success of their enterprise. The uncertainty raised by the Earl's equivocal advice is increased by the arrival of news that Glendower has met with delays in gathering his forces and cannot join Hotspur at the appointed time. The letter in this scene points up the contrast with the immediately preceding scene: there the Prince was actively issuing letters of command, but here Hotspur is receiving a letter and message which heap difficulties on his position.

¹¹³ Ibid., IV, i, ll. 12-18, 31-41.

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of York has grown fearful of the increasing danger of his own position as a fellow-conspirator, and sends letters to recruit aid for himself.

Arch. Hie, good Sir Michael; bear this sealed brief
With winged haste to the lord marshall;
This to my cousin Scroop, and all the rest
To whom they are directed. If you know
How much they do import, you would make haste.

* * *

For if Lord Percy thrive not, ere the king
Dismiss his power, he means to visit us,
For he hath heard of our conspiracy,
And 'tis but wisdom to make strong against him:
Therefore make haste. I must go write again
To other friends; . . .¹¹⁴

The letters mentioned here form a link with the play which is to follow, The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth, in which the forces of the King are indeed to be turned against the Archbishop. Their part in this play is to add to the sense of the many-sided business of intrigue and war, and to show the increasing danger to the conspirators.

The contents of the final letters in the play are uncertain; they are not given at the time the letters are introduced, but are implied elsewhere. In a parley requested by the King, he had offered total forgiveness to the conspirators if they would lay down their arms; but Worcester and Vernon, representatives of the latter and mistrustful of the King's good faith, had carried a contrary message back to Hotspur. A later passage¹¹⁵ implies the peace offer may also have been made in writing. Another of the letters may have been, according to Professor

¹¹⁴Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 1-5, 36-41.

¹¹⁵Ibid., V, v, ll. 2-3.

Bernard Grebanier, the Prince's challenge to Hotspur to settle the issue by single combat with him, a challenge which would almost certainly have been accepted.¹¹⁶ Whatever their contents, a messenger delivers the letters to Hotspur just as the battle is beginning:

Mess. My lord, here are letters for you.
Hot. I cannot read them now.¹¹⁷

If the letters did indeed contain the messages suggested above, then Hotspur's failure to read them proved fatal to many a man that day.

The story of I Henry IV covers widely scattered events in English history from 1400 to 1403. In order to compress the play's far-ranging action, Shakespeare followed Marlowe's precedent in Edward II: he used letters to report off-stage actions and to objectify the many-sided concerns of the clashing forces. Marlowe had also used letters to portray character, but in this respect the pupil surpassed his master, for there is no "letter scene" in Edward II equal in vivid, slashing colors to the portrait in I Henry IV of Hotspur as he reads his father's letter.

Shakespeare was not only showing greater skill in this second period of his career, but he was also exhibiting greater variety: a history trilogy with a farce for sequel, a Roman tragedy, and six romantic comedies varying among themselves in the proportion and character of the high and low comedy elements each contained. The earliest of these romantic comedies, A Midsummer Night's Dream (ca. 1595), contains no

¹¹⁶ Bernard D. N. Grebanier, Essentials of English Literature (revised edition; Great Neck, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1959), I, 83.

¹¹⁷ Shakespeare, op. cit., I Henry IV, V, ii, ll. 79-80.

letters; the next, The Merchant of Venice (ca. 1597), contains eight letters; Much Ado About Nothing (ca. 1598-99),¹¹⁸ however, not only contains letters but also provides a more interesting blend of the various levels of comedy and romance, and for this reason is considered next.

There are three levels of comedy in Much Ado About Nothing: the rather serious high comedy (so nearly a tragedy) of Hero and Claudio, the rollicking light comedy of Beatrice and Benedick, and the thoroughly English low comedy of Dogberry and his cohorts. The main plot, the story of Hero and Claudio, was known in medieval romances in various versions, one of which was retold in Book V of Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (1516), which was published in an English translation by Sir John Harington in 1591, and in Book II, Canto IV of Spenser's Fairie Queene (1590-96). Bullough says the version nearest to Much Ado About Nothing is found in a story by Matteo Bandello published in 1554.¹¹⁹

There is only one reference to letters in Bandello's tale, and that is indirect. In telling of Don Timbreo's early courtship of Feni-
cia (who become Claudio and Hero respectively in Shakespeare's play), Bandello says:

It was all in vain, however, for she never replied to any of the letters and messages he sent her . . .¹²⁰

Unanswered letters constitute one of the standard devices in comedies to

¹¹⁸Shakespeare, op. cit., Much Ado About Nothing, pp. 136-164.

¹¹⁹Matteo Bandello, "Novella XXII," La Prima Parte de la Novelle del Bandello, in Bullough, op. cit., pp. 112-134.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 113.

mark a rejected suitor, and generally, as in this case, make no dramatic contribution to the plot.

The letters which Shakespeare uses in the play are all his own invention. The action is introduced by a letter delivered to Leonato, Governor of Milan, by a messenger from Don Pedro of Aragon, who has just won a battle nearby.

Leon. I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night to Messina.

Mess. He is very near by this. He was not three leagues off when I left him.

* * *

Leon. . . . I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.

Mess. Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro. . . .

Leon. He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it.

Mess. I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him . . . ¹²¹

Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato, knowing that Claudio's friend Benedick is hiding in an arbor where he can overhear them, talk together about how much Beatrice (Leonato's niece) secretly loves Benedick. It is part of a plan they have to bring the two sharp-tongued young people together by making each think the one loves the other. Their conversation, including the discussion of possibly fictitious letters, is of course for Benedick's benefit.

D. Pedro. Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

Leon. No; and swears she never will. That's her torment.

¹²¹ Shakespeare, op. cit., Much Ado About Nothing, I, i, ll. 1-4, 9-13, 18-21.

Claud. 'Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says; 'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'

Leon. This says she now when she is beginning to write to him; for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit in her smock till she have writ a sheet of paper; my daughter tells us all.

Claud. Now you talk of a sheet of paper, I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of.

Leon. O! when she had writ it, and was reading it over, she found Benedick and Beatrice between the sheet?

Claud. That.

Leon. O! she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence; railed at herself, that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her: 'I measure him,' says she, 'by my own spirit; for I should flout him, if he writ to me; yes, though I love him, I should!'

* * *

D. Pedro. It were good that Benedick knew of it by some other, if she will not discover it. ¹²²

The friendly conspirators discuss Beatrice's charms and Benedick's good points as they leave; their stratagem appears effective because Benedick tells himself:

Bene. [Advancing from the arbour.] This can be no trick; the conference was sadly borne. ¹²³
They have the truth of this from Hero . . .

Love me! why, it must be requited. ¹²⁴

In this scene, the mention of letters as proof of Beatrice's affection adds to the realism of the dialogue not only to Benedick, but also to the audience; and the picture of a young girl sitting up late at

¹²²Ibid., II, iii, ll. 137-161, 171-172.

¹²³i.e., appeared serious or in earnest.

¹²⁴Ibid., ll. 240-242, 243.

night in her "smock," alternately writing and tearing up billets doux she does not intend to send, is charming.

Letters provide another merry note at the end of this romantic comedy. Beatrice and Benedick, at the very point of being married, hesitate, and require a final happy push in that direction from their friends.

Leon. Come, Cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman.

Claud. And I'll be sworn upon 't that he loves her,
For here's a paper, written in his hand,
A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,
Fashion'd to Beatrice.

Hero. And here's another,
Writ in my cousin's hand, stolen from her pocket,
Containing her affection unto Benedick.

Bene. A miracle! Here's our own hands against
our hearts. . . .¹²⁵

In summary, the opening letter hearkens back to the initial messenger scene of the early Greek plays in initiating the action of the drama, and the later letters add personality to the characters, realism to the dialogue, and humor to the action.

Julius Caesar (ca. 1599)¹²⁶ represents a third type of drama produced by Shakespeare in this period of his career: a Roman tragedy. The influence of Seneca on Renaissance tragedy has been referred to previously (page 12, above); the line of transmission may be summarized by the following extracts from a book by J. A. K. Thomson: (1) Seneca's plays performed in Latin at the universities, where the "learned pates"

¹²⁵Ibid., V, iv, ll. 83-92.

¹²⁶Ibid., Julius Caesar, pp. 948-977.

were inclined to believe that a dramatist who could not read his Seneca in the original "could not but fail as a dramatic artist"; (2) "intermediaries . . . the many academic authors who had written tragedies . . . in what is called modern Latin"; and (3) the "University Wits [who] carried on this practice, but in English. . . ." ¹²⁷ Typical plays by this last group were Kyd's Pompey the Great (1595) and Marlowe's Tragedy of Queen Dido of Carthage (1594). Many scholars believe that Marlowe was also the author of Titus Andronicus (ca. 1593), and that Shakespeare merely touched up this earliest Roman play credited to him.

Julius Caesar is Senecan in its ghost, revenge motif, Roman story, and number of bloody deaths, but it lacks both the bombast (even in Brutus' and Antony's famous speeches) and the arch-villain, which were also characteristic of Seneca's tragedies. One reason for these differences may lie in Shakespeare's use of his principal source: North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans (1579). North had written in clear, vigorous, Elizabethan prose, not marred by excess euphuisms or latinisms, and Shakespeare appropriated many passages from him almost verbatim. North had also been faithful to Plutarch's psychological study of both the noble and ignoble aspects of the characters of Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius, and so also was Shakespeare. Did Shakespeare follow his source as closely in his use of letters?

Plutarch's first mention of letters in his "Life of Julius Caesar" concerns Caesar's letter-writing habits:

¹²⁷J. A. K. Thomson, Shakespeare and the Classics (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1952), p. 13.

[16] . . . he [Caesar] did further exercise himself to indite letters as he rode by the way, and did occupy two secretaries at once with as much as they could write.¹²⁸

Shakespeare finds no dramatic use for this passage, interesting though it is, in his Julius Caesar.

The first use of letters which Shakespeare takes from Plutarch concerns messages from the conspirators to Brutus, to win him to their side:

[12] Now they that desired change, and wished Brutus only their prince and governor above all other, they durst not come to him themselves to tell him what they would have him do, but in the night did cast sundry papers into the Praetor's [i.e., Brutus'] seat . . . to this effect: "Thou sleepest, Brutus, and art not Brutus indeed." Cassius, finding Brutus' ambition stirred up the more by these seditious bills, did prick him forward and egg him on the more . . ."¹²⁹

Shakespeare uses these letters, but handles them differently. In his Julius Caesar, Cassius himself is both the instigator of the idea and the author of the letters:

Cas. I will this night,
In several hands, in at his [Brutus'] window throw,
As if they came from several citizens,
Writings all tending to the great opinion
That Rome holds of his name; wherein obscurely
Caesar's ambition shall be glanced at.¹³⁰

Shakespeare's Cassius also writes the letters left at Brutus' "seat,"

¹²⁸ Plutarch, Shakespeare's Plutarch, Being a Selection from the Lives in North's Plutarch which Illustrate Shakespeare's Plays, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), "Life of Julius Caesar," p. 57. The bracketed number indicates the chapter number commonly assigned in editions of North's Plutarch.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹³⁰ Shakespeare, op. cit., Julius Caesar, I, ii, ll. 320-325.

one of which he gives along with others to Cinna to deliver:

Cas. Good Cinna, take this paper,
And look you lay it in the praetor's chair,
Where Brutus may but find it; and throw this
In at his window; set this up with wax
Upon old Brutus' statue . . .¹³¹

Shakespeare's use of his source is further emphasized in the following passage from Plutarch:

[6] But for Brutus, his friends and countrymen, . . . by many bills also, did openly call and procure him to do what he did. For under the image of his ancestor Junius Brutus, (that drove the kings out of Rome) they wrote: "O, that it pleased the gods thou wert now alive, Brutus!" and again, "that thou wert here among us now!" His tribunal . . . was full of such bills: "Brutus, thou art asleep, and art not Brutus indeed."¹³²

Plutarch shows Brutus reaching his final decision in a conversation in which Cassius urges the additional inducement of high-level support:

[7] "Why," quoth he [Cassius], "what Roman is he alive that will suffer thee to die for thy liberty? . . . Thinkest thou that they be cobblers, tapsters, or suchlike base mechanical people, that write these bills and scrolls which are found daily in thy praetor's chair, and not the noblest men and best citizens that do it? . . . fully bent to suffer any extremity for thy sake. . . ." Thereupon he embraced Brutus and . . . both went to speak with their friends about it.¹³³

Shakespeare shows Brutus reaching the moment of decision when alone, after a sleepless night of weighing the issues, during which his page has brought him a sealed letter found in his room.

¹³¹Ibid., I, iii, ll. 142-146.

¹³²Plutarch, op. cit., "Life of Marcus Brutus," p. 112.

¹³³Ibid., p. 113.

Bru. /Opens the letter.
 Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake and see thyself.
 Shall Rome, &c. Speak, strike, redress!
 Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake!
 Such instigations have been often dropp'd
 Where I have took them up.
 'Shall Rome, &c.' Thus must I piece it out:
 Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What, Rome?

* * *

Am I entreated
 To speak, and strike? O Rome! I make thee promise;
 If redress will follow, thou receiv'st
 Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus!¹³⁴

Although Shakespeare follows Plutarch in having the conspirators use letters to influence Brutus, it is with two subtle but noteworthy differences. The first is in the letters themselves. Their wording, as recorded by Plutarch, suggests a negative approach--"Thou sleepest," "art not Brutus," and the wish that the dead ancestor of Brutus were alive. Shakespeare echoes the phrases about sleep, but adds, "awake! . . . Speak, strike, redress!" and it is to those positive challenges that Brutus responds. Secondly, the letter seems to have added dramatic value in Shakespeare in that it, and not the conversation with Cassius recorded by Plutarch, is what finally impels Brutus to his fateful decision. It seems more in keeping, moreover, with Shakespeare's portrayal of Brutus as a philosopher, that he should reach his lonely decision after a night of debate with himself under the stars.

Shakespeare had two sources for Artemidorus' warning letter to Caesar. The first was Plutarch, whose account follows:

[14] And one Artemidorus . . . a doctor of rhetoric in the Greek

¹³⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., Julius Caesar, II, 1, ll. 46-52, 55-58.

Shakespeare's handling of the same letter scene offers both similarities and differences when compared with the two above sources.

Enter ARTEMIDORUS, reading a paper.

Art. Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of
Cassius; come not near Casca; have an eye to
Cinna; trust not Trebonius; mark well Metel-
lus Cimber; Decius Brutus loves thee not; thou
hast wronged Caius Ligarius. There is but one
mind in all these men, and it is bent against
Caesar. If thou be'st not immortal, look about
you; security gives way to conspiracy. The
mighty gods defend thee! Thy lover,

ARTEMIDORUS.

Here will I stand till Caesar pass along,
And as a suitor will I give him this.

* * *

If thou read this, O Caesar! thou mayst live;
If not, the Fates with traitors doo contrive.

* * *

/Enter/

A crowd of People; among them ARTEMIDORUS

. . . CAESAR, . . . DECIUS, . . . PUBLIUS, . . . and Others.

* * *

Art. Hail, Caesar! Read this schedule.

Dec. Trebonius doth desire you to o'er-read,
At your best leisure, this his humble suit.

Art. O Caesar! read mine first; for mine's a suit
That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great Caesar.

Caes. What touches us shall be last serv'd.

Art. Delay not, Caesar; read it instantly.

Caes. What! is the fellow mad?

Pub.

Sirrah, give place.

Caes. What! urge you your petitions in the street?
Come to the Capitol.¹³⁹

In comparing these three versions of the same incident, it would seem that Plutarch's offered the greatest dramatic suspense; the audience knows, and the conspirators well may guess, that Caesar has in his hands the warning which may save his life if only he does not fail in his attempts to read it, but this account does not show Caesar's reactions

¹³⁹ Shakespeare, op. cit., Julius Caesar, II, iii, 1-12, 15-16; III, 1, 3-12.

and therefore does not contribute to the portrayal of his character. In this respect the incident in Caesar's Revenge is more satisfying; although the dramatic suspense is only momentary, Caesar's sneering laugh portrays his contempt of the rabble, which helps to build up that play's picture of him as indeed a dictator at heart. In so doing, it meets Aristotle's dictum that in drama character should be shown by the choices made--and Caesar chose to laugh.

In Shakespeare's play the suspense is also only momentary, but the characterization is much more subtle. His Caesar, an astute politician whose play for public approval, "What touches us shall be last serv'd," shows expert showmanship and "know-how"; one can easily imagine that it was delivered in a loud voice for all to hear. Perhaps it does show a greater concern for the common good than for himself, but public statements by shrewd politicians are apt to be for effect. In any case, his "What! is the fellow mad?" and his testy command to present the petition in the proper place portray the habit of command, and perhaps also the special tensions affecting Caesar that day. In all, it provides an excellent example of dramatic hedging.

Caesar's will, although a written document, is not properly speaking a letter, but is interesting as an example of how Shakespeare used his sources. Plutarch says that after Caesar's murder the people remained calm, and "by their great silence they shewed that they were sorry for Caesars death, and also that they did reverence Brutus," and that it was the public reading of Caesar's will which aroused them to fury against the conspirators; he makes no mention of a funeral oration

by Antony.¹⁴⁰ In his "Life of Marcus Brutus," however, he says that first Caesar's will was "openly read," and--

[15] . . . the people then loved him and were marvellous sorry for him. Afterwards when Caesar's body was brought into the market place, Antonious making his funeral oration . . ., framed his eloquence to make their hearts yearn the more; and taking Caesar's gown all bloody, laid it open to the sight of them all. . . . Therewithal the people fell . . . into such a rage and mutiny. . . .¹⁴¹

Shakespeare shows his skill as a dramatist by choosing the more dramatic account of the two, and even greater skill in his rearrangement of events to make the reading of the will a part of Antony's oration instead of preliminary to it. The will, the bloody robe, and the oration combine with centripetal force to create a scene far more powerful than a series of separate actions would have produced. Furthermore, the will itself is appropriate to Caesar's character as a demagogue, the reaction of the people to it portrays the fickleness of the mob, and Antony's reaction--use it now and destroy it later--reveals his cynicism, opportunism, and lack of personal integrity.

The final letters in Julius Caesar occur just before the action at Philippi. For the same time period Plutarch briefly records four letters from Brutus: one to Cassius to arrange a juncture of their forces, one to Pomponious Atticus concerning the coming battle, a series (actually battle orders) to his captains at Philippi, and one (found after his death) addressed to friends at Rome, complaining that they had

¹⁴⁰Plutarch, op. cit., "Life of Julius Caesar," p. 102.

¹⁴¹Ibid., "Life of Marcus Brutus," pp. 121-122.

not prevented his wife's suicide.¹¹² The first three are routine military messages; the last, found posthumously, was never delivered. Shakespeare uses none of them, although for the same period he also uses a series of the type of military-statecraft letters commonly employed in history plays to report off-stage action, and refers twice to letters reporting Portia's death.

In order to recruit troops to oppose the avenging armies of Antony and Octavius, Brutus and Cassius had traveled separately through various parts of the eastern Roman world, and when they finally join forces near Philippi a bitter quarrel breaks out over letters that have passed between them:

Cas. That you have wrong'd me doth appear in this:
You have condemn'd and noted Lucius Pella
For taking bribes here of the Sardians;
Wherein my letters, praying on his side,
Because I knew the man, were slighted off.

Bru. You wrong'd yourself to write in such a case.

* * *

Bru. I did send
To you for gold to pay my legions,
Which you denied me. Was that done like Cassius?
Should I have answered Caius Cassius so? . . .

Cas. I denied you not.

Bru. You did.¹¹³

The off-stage action related by these letters is relatively unimportant to the plot, but their contents do reveal a great deal about the character of each. Cassius is revealed as the Tammany Hall "type," who believes it loyal and ethical to use "influence" to get even a guilty

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 129, 130, 140-141, 151-152.

¹¹³Shakespeare, op. cit., Julius Caesar, IV, iii, ll. 1-6, 75-78, 82-83.

friend "off the hook." Brutus is too honorable to use "vile means" to raise money, but is angry that Cassius refuses him use of such money. Both men are on edge--Brutus because of Portia's ghastly suicide, Cassius perhaps because of thwarted ambition--and their quarrel degenerates into childish name-calling and personal vituperation. That, and the reconciliation which follows, are splendid examples of dramatic hedging: Brutus is not wholly a saint, nor is Cassius wholly evil.

After their reconciliation Brutus tells Cassius about two messages he had received from Rome, one concerning Portia and the other concerning their opponents:

Bru. Impatient of my absence,
And grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony
Have made themselves so strong;--for with her death
That tidings came:--with this she fell distract,
And, her attendants absent, swallow'd fire.
Cas. And died so?
Bru. Even so.
Cas. O ye immortal gods!
Bru. Speak no more of her. Give me a bowl of wine. ^{llh}

After Brutus and Cassius have drunk a pledge of friendship, Messala joins them for a military staff conference.

Cas. Portia, art thou gone?
Bru. No more, I pray you.
Messala, I have here received letters
That young Octavius and Mark Antony
Come down upon us with a mighty power,
Bending their expedition towards Philippi.
Mes. Myself have letters of the self-same tenour.
Bru. With what addition?
Mes. That by proscription and bills of outlawry,
Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus
Have put to death an hundred senators.

^{llh}Ibid., ll. 151-157.

Bru. Therein our letters do not well agree;
Mine speak of seventy senators that died
By their proscriptions, Cicero being one.

Cas. Cicero one!

Mes.

Cicero is dead,

And that by order of proscription.

Had you letters from your wife, my lord?

Bru. No, Messala.

Mes. Nor nothing in your letter writ of her?

Bru. Nothing, Messala.

Mes.

That, methinks, is strange.

Bru. Why ask you? Hear you aught of her in yours?

Mes. No, my lord.

Bru. Now, as you are a Roman, tell me true.

Mes. Then like a Roman hear the truth I tell:

For certain she is dead, and by a strange manner.

Bru. Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala.
With meditating that she must die once,

I have the patience to endure it now.

Mes. Even so great men great losses should endure.

Cas. I have as much of this in art as you,

But yet my nature could not bear it so.

Bru. Well, to our work alive . . . ¹⁴⁵

This passage has been quoted in full because its subtle undertones are not subject to paraphrase without distortion.

The inclusion of the deeply personal message among the purely military-political reports creates a more poignant emotional setting for the action. Here Brutus, Cassius, and Messala are not the starkly heroic or villainous military figures of pre-Elizabethan drama; they are painfully and grandly human beings: one seeking to absorb (or turn away from?) an unbearable loss; another almost too voluble in his condolences (a heart least capable of sharing love or grief feeling most obligated to vocalize?); the third so gently and reluctantly being the first (as he thought) to impart his sad message; and always there is the background

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., ll. 165-195.

of military business, the war that must go on, and the two leaders who must rise above their squabbling to mutual respect and personal heroism.

In a footnote to line 189 of the play in his edition, Harrison offers two solutions to the question of the repetition of the message concerning Portia:

There seems to be a discrepancy in this passage, for Brutus has already told Cassius of Portia's death. Either the scene was re-written and, as sometimes happened in the printing of Shakespeare's plays, both the original and the revised passage have been left, or else Shakespeare wished to exhibit Brutus displaying stoic calm.¹⁴⁶

A third solution suggests itself from personal experience: Portia was very much in Brutus' mind and he wanted the comfort of talking about her, but found it easier to do for a few moments (which he drew out a bit; otherwise he could have admitted his knowledge at once to Messala) with a friend whose very real sympathy he sensed, than with Cassius, who was too ready with conventional condolences.

To summarize the many letters in Julius Caesar: one finds that four of the letters recorded in Plutarch were not used by Shakespeare; that Caesar's will and the four other letters in Plutarch, including one repeated in the play, Caesar's Revenge, were used by him; and that eight letters were wholly original with Shakespeare. Where enough of the contents of the letters adapted by Shakespeare from his sources makes a comparison of the letters themselves possible, Shakespeare's are found to be more skilfully worded. It is to be remembered, of course, that Plutarch was writing historical biography, not drama; Shakespeare, on

¹⁴⁶Harrison, op. cit., p. 558.

the other hand, as a dramatist was interested in making the letters he used more dramatically effective. In Plutarch, the characters of Caesar, Brutus, and the others are shown primarily by their actions and the author's descriptive passages; in Shakespeare's plays they are revealed by their actions and their reactions, and he has used letters more often in this play than in any other as an effective means of evoking subtle lights and shadows in his portraits of their complex characters.

Because romantic high comedies account for six of the eleven plays in this period of Shakespeare's career, the consideration of a second such comedy is required to achieve a balanced proportion in plays representative of this stage of his development. Twelfth Night, or What You Will (ca. 1600)¹⁴⁷ has been selected for this purpose because it also contains a large element of farce; in this respect it may be considered to represent The Merry Wives of Windsor, Shakespeare's one farce during this period, as well.

Although Twelfth Night is a romantic high comedy, it borrows some elements, as The Comedy of Errors had done, from a Latin farce, The Menaechni of Plautus, which was itself a version of an earlier Greek play. Various French and Italian plays and tales were based on The Menaechni;¹⁴⁸ Shakespeare's play is similar to one of these, Gl'Ingannati (1537),¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷Shakespeare, op. cit., Twelfth Night, or What you Will, pp. 343-370.

¹⁴⁸Bullough, op. cit., II, 269-275.

¹⁴⁹Gl'Ingannati (a play of the Academy of the Intonati at Siena), Bullough, op. cit., II, 286-339.

and to an English prose derivative by Barnaby Riche, "The Story of Apolonius and Silla" in Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession (1581).¹⁵⁰

In Gl'Ingannati, Lelia, disguised as a page of Flamminio, whom she secretly loves, carries letters and gifts from him to Isabella, whom he loves. Isabella spurns the master because she has fallen in love with his page. Lelia explains the situation to Clemenzia, a nurse:

LELIA. I'll tell you. Flamminio, as I have told you already, is enamoured of Isabella Foiani, and often sends me with letters and messages. She believes me to be a man, and has fallen passionately in love with me.¹⁵¹

Just as Duke Orsino depends in his courtship of Olivia on the aid of his page "Cesario" (Viola), so does Flamminio in his courtship of Isabella depend on his page "Fabio" (Lelia).

FLAMMINIO. It is indeed a strange thing, Fabio, that until now I have not been able to extort one kind answer from this cruel and ungracious Isabella. Yet I cannot believe that she entirely hates me since she is always willing to give you audience and to receive you kindly. . . . Tell me again, please, Fabio, what she said to you yesterday when you went with that letter.¹⁵²

In Barnaby Riche's Tale, Apolonius in his courtship of Julina employs the aid of his loving page "Silvio" (Silla).

To this Ladie Julina Apolonius became an earnest suter; and accordyng to the maner of woers, besides faire woordes, sorrowful sighes, and piteous countenaunces, there must bee sendyng of lovyng letters, . . . and presentes . . . and who must bee the

¹⁵⁰ Barnaby Riche, Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession, in Bullough, op. cit., II, 344-363.

¹⁵¹ Gl'Ingannati, op. cit., p. 297.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 302.

messenger to carry the tokens and love letters to the Ladie Julina, but Silvio, his manne: in hym the Duke reposed his onely confidence to goe betweene hym and his ladie.¹⁵³

There is no other reference to letters in either of the two sources next above.

Shakespeare's plot of Twelfth-Night is more complex. There are two suitors for Olivia's hand: the noble suitor, Duke Orsino, who is himself loved by Viola (disguised as the page "Cesario"); and Olivia's household steward, Malvolio, an unpleasant character who becomes a suitor as the result of a humorous plot hatched by her maid, Maria, and by her mischief-loving uncle, Sir Toby, his old friend, Sir Andrew, and Feste, Olivia's clown.

The first letters in the play are used by these characters in the secondary plot to play a practical joke on the unpopular Malvolio. Maria shows them to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.

Mar. I will drop in his way some obscure epistles of love, wherein, by the color of his beard, the shape of his leg, the manner of his gait, the expresseure of his eye, forehead, and complexion, he shall find himself most feelingly personated. I can write very like my lady your niece. On a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands.

Sir To. Excellent! I smell a device.

Sir And. I have't in my nose too.

Sir To. He shall think, by the letters that thou wilt drop, that they come from my niece, and that she's in love with him.

Mar. My purpose is indeed a horse of that color.

* * *

¹⁵³Riche, Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession, op. cit., p. 351.

I know my physic
will work with him. I will plant you two,
and let the fool make a third, where he shall find
the letter; observe his construction of it.¹⁵⁴

The two old gentlemen and Olivia's servants, Fabian and Maria,
conceal themselves in the garden to observe, hopefully, how Malvolio
will make a fool of himself over the letter composed as if written by
Olivia. They whisper delighted comments as they watch the success of
their practical joke.

Mar. Observe him, for the
love of mockery, for I know this letter will
make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in
the name of jesting! Lie thou there: Throws
down a letter for here comes the trout that
must be caught with tickling. Exit.

Enter MALVOLIO

* * *

Mal. Seeing the letter. What employment
have we here?

* * *

Mal. Taking up the letter. By my life, this
is my lady's hand. These be her very C's, her U's,
and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's.
It is, in contempt of question, her hand.

* * *

Mal. Reads. To the unknown beloved, this
and my good wishes: her very phrases! By
your leave, wax. Soft! and the impressure her
Lucrece, with which she uses to seal: 'tis my
lady. To whom should this be?

Fab. This wins him, liver and all.

Mal. Jove knows I love;

But who?

Lips, do not move:

No man must know.

'No man must know.' What follows? the num-
bers altered! 'No man must know:' if this
should be thee, Malvolio!

¹⁵⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., Twelfth-Night, II, iiii, ll. 171-185,
190-194.

Sir To. Marry, hang thee, brock!

Mal. I may command where I adore;

But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore:
M, O, A, I, doth sway my life.¹⁵⁵

Malvolio ponders aloud on the meaning of these initials, while his hidden audience make exasperated but delighted comments.

Mal. . . . and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name. Soft! here follows prose.

If this fall into thy hand, revolve. In my stars
I am above thee; but be not afraid of greatness.
Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and
some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy fates
open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace
them, and to inure thyself to what thou art like
to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh.
Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants,
let thy tongue tang arguments of state, put thyself
into the trick of singularity. She thus advises thee
that sighs for thee. Remember who commended
thy yellow stockings, and wished to see thee ever
cross-gartered. I say, remember. Go to, thou art
made, if thou desirest to be so. If not, let me see
thee a steward still, the fellow of servants, and not
worthy to touch Fortune's fingers. Farewell. She
that would alter services with thee,

THE FORTUNATE-UNHAPPY¹⁵⁶

Malvolio reacts as Maria, who wrote the letters, knew he would; he will be proud, will be surly with Olivia's cousin, Sir Toby, will be arrogant towards the other servants--everything the letter suggests.

Mal. . . . I will
 be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-
 gartered, even with the swiftness of putting on.
 Jove and my stars be praised! Here is yet a
 postscript.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., II, v, 11. 21-26, 91-92, 96-99, 102-119.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 11. 154-174.

Thou canst not choose but know who I am. If thou entertainest my love, let it appear in thy smiling. Thy smiles become thee well, therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee.

Jove, I thank thee. I will smile, I will do everything that thou wilt have me. Exit.

Fab. I will not give my part of this sport for a pension of thousands to be paid from the Sophy.

Sir To. I could marry this wench for this device--

* * *

Re-enter MARIA.

Mar. Nay, but say true; does it work upon him?

Sir To. Like aqua vitae with a midwife.

Mar. If you will then see the fruits of the sport, mark his first approach before my lady; he will come to her in yellow stockings, and 'tis a color she abhors, and cross-gartered, a fashion she detests. And he will smile upon her, which will now be so unsuitable to her disposition, being addicted to a melancholy as she is, that it cannot but turn him into a notable contempt. If you will see it, follow me.¹⁵⁷

These letters forged by Maria are important to the action, the characterization, and the mood of the play. They motivate the secondary plot; the reactions of Malvolio to them and of his listeners to him are brilliant, unforgettable pieces of characterization; and the scene as a whole establishes a mood of what one may call "high farce" to underscore the high comedy of the primary plot. They are not found in Shakespeare's sources, although the misunderstood letter was a device not uncommon to farce, as in Udall's Roister Doister.

There are several basic differences in Udall's and Shakespeare's use of such a letter. First, Udall's is based primarily on a clever,

¹⁵⁷Ibid., ll. 185-201, 215-226.

grammatical trick of punctuation, while Shakespeare's is based on a subtle understanding of human nature. In the second place, Udall's letter is first read as a long, uninterrupted epistle, and although the audience may guess the trick of Merygreeke's way of reading it, its other meaning is not clear until several scenes later when it is read correctly by the scribe. One would have to have a good memory, not being presented with them side by side, as it were, to appreciate all the subtle changes of meaning. In Twelfth-Night, however, Malvolio frequently interrupts his reading of the letters (with their bits of poetry inserted for variety) with remarks that show the misinterpretation he is giving to each portion, while his listeners make note of his mistakes with their pointed comments, and Maria at once lets them and the audience in on the remaining mischief which can be expected from the letter. The third and most dramatic difference lies in the fact that the misunderstanding of Roister Doister's letter was due chiefly to a mechanical device, while Malvolio's is due to his basic defects of character. Finally the objective touches of the cross-gartered yellow hose and the smiling face provide for some hilarious stage business later.

When Malvolio appears before the pensive Olivia with a silly smile on his face, he makes such a fool of himself in his dress, manner, high-flown talk, and insinuating quotations from the letters that Olivia thinks him touched with madness and sends for Sir Toby to put him out of harm's way.

Sir Andrew, the foolish old friend of Sir Toby, fancies himself another of Olivia's suitors and becomes jealously irritated when he

overhears her loving words to "Cesario" (Viola disguised as the Duke's page); Sir Toby and Fabian mischievously seize the opportunity to urge him to send a letter challenging "Cesario" to a duel.

Fab. There is no way but this, Sir Andrew.

Sir And. Will either of you bear me a challenge to him?

Sir To. Go, write it in a martial hand. Be curst and brief; it is no matter how witty, so it be eloquent and full of invention: taunt him with the license of ink: if thou thou'st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss; and as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper, although the sheet were big enough for the bed of Ware in England, set 'em down: go, about it. Let there be gall enough in thy ink, though thou write with a goose pen, no matter; about it.¹⁵⁸

After Sir Andrew departs to write his *quite unwilling* challenge, Fabian predicts they'll get "a rare letter" from him and agrees with the irresponsible Sir Toby that both the old man and the young page are too timid actually to fight. It was a rare letter indeed that Sir Andrew soon showed them!

Sir And. Here's the challenge, read it. I warrant there's vinegar and pepper in 't.

* * *

Sir To. Give me. Youth, whatsoever thou art, thou art but a scurvy fellow.

Fab. Good, and valiant.

Sir To. Wonder not, nor admire not in thy mind, why I do call thee so, for I will show thee no reason for't.

Fab. A good note, that keeps you from the blow of the law.

Sir To. Thou comest to the Lady Olivia, and in my sight she uses thee kindly; but thou liest in thy throat; that is not the matter I challenge thee for.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., III, ii, ll. 44-56.

Fab. Very brief, and to exceeding good sense--less.

Sir To. I will waylay thee going home; where, if it be thy chance to kill me,--

Fab. Good.

Sir To. Thou killest me like a rogue and a villain.

Fab. Still you keep o' the windy side of the law: good.

Sir To. Fare thee well; and God have mercy upon one of our souls! He may have mercy upon mine, but my hope is better, and so look to thyself. Thy friend, as thou usest him, and thy sworn enemy,

ANDREW AGUECHEEK.

If this letter move him not, his legs cannot. I'll give't him.¹⁵⁹

The letter apparently was even worse than anticipated, for after Sir Andrew leaves, Sir Toby tells Fabian he will not deliver it.

Sir To. Now will not I deliver his letter, for the behavior of the young gentleman gives him out to be of good capacity and breeding; . . . therefore this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will breed no terror in the youth; he will find it comes from a clodpole. But, sir, I will deliver his challenge by word of mouth . . . [and] so fright them both that they will kill one another by the look, like cockatrices.¹⁶⁰

Although the challenge letter is not delivered, it does affect the action of the play because Sir Andrew thinks it has been and that therefore he must fight "Cesario" on sight. It is useful in delineating character in that it points up Sir Andrew's silliness and timidity, Sir Toby's irresponsibility, and (through his comment on her) Viola's intelligence. What appears more interesting, however, is the dramatist

¹⁵⁹Ibid., III, iv, ll. 159-160, 163-192.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., ll. 205-207, 209-213, 217-219.

Shakespeare as a conscious artist. He has Sir Toby give precise, if ironic, directions to Sir Andrew, and his terse comment, "so excellently ignorant" is a choice bit of literary criticism!

Meanwhile, Malvolio, shut up in a dark cell, treated as if insane, and teased unmercifully by Sir Toby and the clown, begs the latter for writing materials so he can send for help.

Mal. . . . Good fool, some
ink, paper, and light; and convey what I will
set down to my lady: it shall advantage thee
more than ever the bearing of letter did.¹⁶¹

When Viola's true identity has been established and the Duke asks to see her in woman's dress, she tells him that the sea captain who has her clothing has been jailed on Malvolio's orders, which reminds Olivia that she has had Malvolio "put away" because of his distracted mind. Just then the clown arrives with Malvolio's letter:

Clo. . . . [He] has here writ a letter to you. I should have given it you today morning, but as a madman's epistles are no gospels, so it skills not much when they are delivered.
Oli. Open it, and read it.
Clo. Look then to be well edified, when the fool delivers the madman.¹⁶²

The clown apparently starts to read it in a foolish manner.

Oli. [To FABIAN] Read it you, sirrah.
Fab. By the Lord, madam, you wrong me,
and the world shall know it. Though you
have put me into darkness and given your
drunken cousin rule over me, yet have I the
benefit of my senses as well as your ladyship.

¹⁶¹Ibid., IV, ii, ll. 120-123.

¹⁶²Ibid., V, i, ll. 296-302.

I have your own letter that induced me to the
semblance I put on, with the which I doubt not
but to do myself much right, or you much shame.
Think of me as you please. I leave my duty a
little unthought-of, and speak out of my injury.

THE MADLY-USED MALVOLIO

Oli. Did he write this?

Clo. Aye, madam.

Duke. This savours not much of distraction.

Oli. See him deliver'd, Fabian; bring him hither. ¹⁶³

In a short time Fabian returns with Malvolio, who is no longer verbose and silly, but speaks with terse, lucid, outraged dignity.

Mal. Madam, you have done me wrong,
Notorious wrong.

Oli. Have I, Malvolio? no.

Mal. Lady, you have. Pray you peruse that letter.
You must not now deny it is your hand.

Write from it, if you can, in hand or phrase,

Or say 'tis not your seal, not your invention.

You can say none of this. Well, grant it then

And tell me, in the modesty of honor,

Why you have given me such clear lights of favor, . . .

* * *

Oli. Alas, Malvolio, this is not my writing.

Though, I confess, much like the character.

But out of question, 'tis Maria's hand:

And now I do bethink me, it was she

First told me thou wast mad, then can'st in smiling.

And in such forms which here were presupposed

Upon thee in the letter. Prithee, be content:

. . . we shall know the grounds and authors of it . . . ¹⁶⁴

Fabian then confesses both the names and the motives of the authors of the letter, and suggests that their prank merits laughter rather than revenge.

In summing up the letters in Twelfth-Night one sees that, like his sources, Shakespeare has a disguised page act as messenger for the

¹⁶³ Ibid., ll. 312-327.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., ll. 340-348, 357-362, 365.

man she loves to the lady whom he loves, but neither Shakespeare nor his sources furnish the actual contents of the letters so carried; the fact that the "pages" did so simply underscores their unselfish, devoted characters. As a dramatic device they provide the situation so pleasing to an audience, that of being cognizant of secrets unknown to the characters themselves on the stage.

The three actual letters are Maria's forgery addressed to Malvolio, Sir Andrew's challenge to "Cesario," and Malvolio's plea from jail. The first of these has been discussed in relation to a prototype in Roister Doister. The other two are interesting in their almost uncanny portrayal of the character and mood of their authors: Sir Andrew's being "so excellently ignorant," and Malvolio's that "savours not much of distraction." Most interesting, however, seems the impression conveyed of Shakespeare as a conscious craftsman of words. In his plays-within-plays he has characters give advice on the art of acting; here he has Sir Toby give advice to Sir Andrew on writing. While the advice is given "tongue-in-cheek," nevertheless it shows a dramatist who knew what he was doing, and who enjoyed a sense of mastery.

A review of the four plays considered in the second period of Shakespeare's career shows that he used letters more freely than before, and that he relied less on his sources for the letters which he did use. Military and government communiqués, love letters, simple personal messages, challenges, letters of intrigue, and letters as practical jokes either reported off-stage events, affected action, created suspense, established mood, or revealed character, or combined two or more of

these uses to create a rich, multi-purposed dramatic device of increasing flexibility and subtlety.

III. "DE PROFUNDIS," 1600-08

The third period of Shakespeare's literary career reflects a series of both personal and public tragedies. His only son had died in 1596, his father died in 1601, and his mother in 1603. The Earl of Southampton, to whom he had dedicated his Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece (and possibly the Sonnets), and the great Earl of Essex were tried for high treason in 1601 and sentenced to death, and although Southampton was granted a reprieve, Essex was beheaded. In 1603 the glorious "Age of Elizabeth" ended with the death of the great Queen herself. Underlying all this was the intense emotional experience suggested by the sonnets, which were written, according to Grebanier, between 1591 and 1603.¹⁶⁵ Without attempting to construct a biographical interpretation of their meaning, Tucker Brooke wrote of the sonnets:

They abound in meditations on estrangement, failure, and death. They bewail the poet's outcaste state, death's dateless night, the anxieties of separation, time's giving and taking away, even world-weariness.¹⁶⁶

It was "out of the depths" of these events and experiences that Shakespeare turned from his joyous comedies to the bitter, "problem" tragicomedies and great tragedies of the years 1600 to 1608.

¹⁶⁵ Grebanier, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Tucker Brooke, "The Renaissance," in Albert C. Baugh (ed.), A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 452.

Troilus and Cressida (ca. 1601-02)¹⁶⁷ is not a poignant tragedy of two lovers, as it was in Shakespeare's chief source, Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde (ca. 1385-86),¹⁶⁸ but a tale of lust and disloyalty. Harrison says of it:

It is a distinctly unpleasant play. . . . Here love is smirched and mocked with filthy bitterness, and heroism is made ridiculous. . . . There is no romance, no beauty, no heroism, and no nobility. Troilus and Cressida is the work of a man in the bitterest mood of disillusionment. . . .¹⁶⁹

There is as little similarity between the letters in Shakespeare's play and those in Chaucer's romance as there is between the mood of the play and that of the poem. The first letter in Chaucer is a charming little "complaint" from Oenone to Paris, after he has deserted her for Helen; Pandarus quotes this when trying to persuade Troilus to reveal the cause of his unhappiness.¹⁷⁰

When Pandarus has learned that Troilus is pining for Criseyde, he advises him to write her a letter declaring his love for her:

. . . if I were as thou,
God help me so, as I wolde outrely,
Of myn owen hond, write hire right now
A lettre, in which I wold hire tellen how
I ferde amys, and hire biseche of routhes.
Now help thiself, and leve it nought for slouthes!¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷Shakespeare, op. cit., Troilus and Cressida, pp. 769-808.

¹⁶⁸Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2nd ed., 1957), pp. 389-479.

¹⁶⁹Harrison, op. cit., pp. 656-657.

¹⁷⁰Geoffrey Chaucer, op. cit., I, ll. 652-672.

¹⁷¹Ibid., I, ll. 1003-1008.

Pandarus gives explicit instructions about what Troilus should say in his letter and promises to deliver it. Chaucer describes the contents of the letter (which were in the best traditions of the medieval "Court of Love"), and how Troilus wept as he sealed it, Pandarus playfully delivered it, and Criseyde modestly received it.¹⁷² This is followed by a description of Criseyde's answer, of which she said:

She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde
In love; but as his suster, hym to plesse,
She wolde ay fayn, to doon his herte an ese.¹⁷³

Criseyde's letter increases Troilus' hope and desire, and he writes to her frequently.

So thorough this lettre, which that she hym sente,
Encressen gan desir, of which he brente.

* * *

Fro day to day he leet it nought refreyde,¹⁷⁴
That by Pandare he wroot somewhat or seyde;

The next letter in Chaucer is one from Hector, which is used as a ruse at a dinner party to occupy the attention of the two most important guests, Helen of Troy and Prince Deiphobus, so that Troilus and Criseyde may have a private meeting. After that, the poem tells us, Pandarus "to and fro was sent; He lettres bar whan Troilus was absent;" and that it would take "Neigh half this book" to tell what was in their epistles.¹⁷⁵

After Troilus was able to enjoy frequent secret meetings with

¹⁷²Ibid., II, ll. 1065-1178.

¹⁷³Ibid., II, ll. 1223-1225.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., II, ll. 1336-1337, 1343-1344.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., III, ll. 487-488, 503.

Criseyde letters between them were no longer necessary, but the day came when she was demanded by her father, who had defected to the Greeks, in exchange for a captured Trojan prince, and much against her will she was led off to the Greek camp by Diomede. Before leaving she promised Troilus she would find some way to return to him within a few days, certainly by "The tenthe day . . . withouten any faille," and he is left to count the days until her return and re-read old love letters from her:

The lettres ek that she of olde tyme
Hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede 176
An hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,

When the tenth day had come and gone without the return of Criseyde, Troilus wrote her a beautiful letter of love and despair, in over a hundred poignant lines which Chaucer sets apart under its own heading, "Litera Troilii."¹⁷⁷ Criseyde replied with excuses, promises that "also sone as that she myghte, ywys, She wolde come," and "swerth she loveth hym best."¹⁷⁸

In the meantime she has yielded to Diomede's skilful love-making, and when Troilus

. . . wroot yet ofte tyme al newe
Ful pitously, . . .
Bisechyng hire, syn that he was trewe,
That she wol come ayeyn . . .¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶Ibid., V, ll. 470-472.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., V, ll. 1317-1421.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., V, ll. 1423-1431.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., V, ll. 1583-1586.

Criseyde's reply--her last--was a "Litera Criseydis" of forty-two lines, saying that she was sorry about it all, that he did not seem to take "the goddes ordinaunce" for the best, that she did not know when she would be able to come to him, but would remember his "frendship ay," and to please excuse the brevity of her letter.¹⁸⁰

Troilus sadly recognized this for the "Dear John" letter that it was, but could not stop loving Criseyde.

Thorough which I se that clene out of youre mynde
Ye han me cast; and I ne kan nor may,
For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde
To unloven yow a quarter of a day!¹⁸¹

Chaucer had written a beautiful medieval romance, but when Shakespeare turned it into a bitter drama of disillusionment he discarded all the lovely letters of the poem except the last one, and this, together with Troilus' reaction, he completely transforms.

As TROILUS is going out / to rejoin the fighting
around Troy /, enter, from the other side, PANDARUS.

Pan. Do you hear, my lord, do you hear?

Tro. What now?

Pan. Here's a letter come to you from yond poor girl.

Tro. Let me read.

Pan. A whoreson tisick, a whoreson rascally
tisick so troubles me, and the foolish fortune of
this girl; . . . What says she there?

Tro. Words, words, mere words; no matter from the heart;
The effect doth operate another way.

/Tearing the letter.

Go, wind to wind, there turn and change together.
My love with words and errors still she feeds,
But edifies another with her deeds.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰Ibid., V, ll. 1590-1631.

¹⁸¹Ibid., V, ll. 1694-1697.

¹⁸²Shakespeare, op. cit., Troilus and Cressida, V, ii, ll. 97-103, 107-113.

The savage bitterness of Troilus' reaction to this letter drives him back to the battlefield with but one thought--to find and kill Diomedes, the Greek whom Cressida currently "edifies . . . with her deeds." Brief scenes show Diomedes sending Troilus' captured horse as a present to his "Lady Cressid," and Troilus fighting Ajax, but Shakespeare does not even grant a warrior's death in battle to Troilus; the last moments of the play show him turning against Pandarus, fiercely denouncing him as a "brother lackey."

Although the story of Troilus and Cressida was taken from Chaucer's poem, some of the episodes in Shakespeare's play (Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon and withdrawal from the fighting, the combat between Ajax and Hector, the mission of Ulysses and Nestor to Achilles, for example) were taken from Chapman's translation of the Seaven Bookes of the Iliades of Homere, Prince of Poets (1598). Since there are no written messages in the Iliad, it appears that the other letters in Troilus and Cressida were Shakespeare's invention. The first of these is used by the crafty Ulysses as the springboard of his campaign to persuade Achilles to return to combat.

Ulysses plans carefully: first Agamemnon, Menelaus, Ajax, and other Greek leaders will pass casually by Achilles' tent and either ignore him or--

Lay negligent and loose regard upon him.
 I will come last. 'Tis like he'll question me
 Why such unplausive eyes are bent on him.
 If so, I have derision medicinable
 To use between your strangeness and his pride. ¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Ibid., III, 111, ll. 41-45.

All goes as planned; Achilles' pride is hurt by the indifference of the leaders, and when Ulysses strolls past, reading, he stops him.

Achil. What are you reading?

Ulyss. A strange fellow here
Writes me,

That man, how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without or in,
Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
Nor feels not what he owes but by reflection;
As when his virtues shining upon others
Heat them, and they retort that heat again
To the first giver.¹⁸⁴

Achilles takes the bait, and says he does not think it strange that greatness is realized only when others recognize and applaud it. Ulysses follows up by citing Ajax as an example of a man great in the eyes of the Greeks through popular applause of his deeds in battle, and the jealous Achilles is quick to get the comparison.

Ulyss. . . . Why, even already
They clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder
As if his foot were on brave Hector's breast
And great Troy shrieking.

Achil. I do believe it; for they pass'd by me
As misers do by beggars, neither gave to me
Good word or look: what! are my deeds forgot?¹⁸⁵

Ulysses quickly follows up his point with the great speech on time and fame.

Ulyss. Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
A great-siz'd monster of ingrattitudes:
Those scraps are good deeds past; . . .¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., ll. 96-102.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., ll. 138-144.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., ll. 145-148.

When the wily Ulysses is through with Achilles, the latter is convinced that his reputation as the greatest fighter of the Greeks will be lost if Ajax wins a scheduled combat with Hector; he has ceased to sulk, has become interested again in the progress of the war, and wants to resume his place of importance in it. He sends Thersites with a message to Ajax inviting him to get a safe-conduct from Agamemnon for Hector, and to come to a meeting of the Greek leaders with the Trojan hero in his tent.

Achil. Come, thou shalt bear a letter to him straight.

Ther. Let me bear another to his horse, for that's the more capable creature.

Achil. My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirr'd:
And I myself see not the bottom of it.¹⁸⁷

Thus this letter verifies the success of the conversation set up by the preceding letter, and at the same time it sets the stage for the next important action in the plot.

The last letter is also carried by Thersites; it is one from Hecuba to Achilles, and is accompanied by a token from her daughter, Polixena, whom the Greek warrior loves. He and Patroclus have been planning to get Hector drunk (during his visit under a flag of truce that night), so that he will be handicapped when Achilles meets him in combat the following day, when Thersites enters.

Achil. How now, thou core of envy!
Thou crusty batch of nature, what's the news?

Ther. Why, thou picture of what thou seemest, an idol of idiot-worshippers, here's a letter for thee.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., ll. 310-315.

Achil. From whence, fragment?

Ther. Why, thou dish of fool, from Troy.

* * *

Achil. . . . I am thwarted quite
From my great purpose in to-morrow's battle.
Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba,
A token from her daughter, my fair love,
Both taxing me and gaging me to keep
An oath that I have sworn. I will not break it:
Fall Greeks; fall fame; honour or go or stay;
My major vow lies here, this I'll obey.¹⁸⁸

This letter epitomizes the dominant mood of the play: the triumph of selfish lust over duty, honor, reputation, even patriotism. Apparently Achilles had promised Polixena (Hecuba's daughter) that he would not fight her brother, Hector; her reminder of that pledge persuades him to abandon his promise to his own forces that he would do so. What is the only motive that is stronger than honor, patriotism or lust, and finally brings Achilles face to face with Hector on the following day? It is the passion for revenge against the slayer of Patrochus, Achilles' partner in homosexuality.

The four letters in this play objectify Cressida's faithlessness, Ulysses' craftiness, and Achilles' arrogance and (in his reaction to the last letter) his lack of honor as a warrior. One might argue that at least he kept his promise to Polixena for a while, but against this Shakespeare sets the scene of Hector's resolute honor and patriotism in the face of the loving pleas of his wife and his father; furthermore, Achilles' transient loyalty to his oath to Polixena collapsed before his vengeance for his dead male paramour. One can only wonder--if Shakespeare

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., V, i, ll. 4-10, 42-49.

had dramatized Chaucer's wistful romance during an earlier, happier period of his dramatic development--what delicate characterization and beautiful poetry the letters in Troilus and Criseyde might have inspired him to write.

The first of Shakespeare's great tragedies was Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1602).¹⁸⁹ It is like Kyd's Spanish Tragedy in that it is a tragedy of revenge, but it is also a great problem play--in fact, a play of many problems.

Harrison discusses the sources of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the introduction to his edition of the play.

The story of Hamlet in some form is at least seven hundred years old. Hamlet appears first as Amlethus in the Historica Danica, written by Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth century. The original source of the English play is a French story told in the Histoires tragiques of Francois de Belleforest, published in Paris in 1576. . . . a Hamlet play [was] in existence and popular between 1589 and 1596. It is not likely that this was Shakespeare's play as it is now known.¹⁹⁰

Belleforest's Histoires was not available at the University of Richmond Library, but Harrison gives an outline of it, in which the only reference to letters is as follows:

Penegon then sent Hamlet to the King of England, with sealed letters commanding that he should be put to death. On the voyage Hamlet read the letters and exchanged them for others in which it was ordered that the bearer should be hanged and he himself should be married to the daughter of the King of England.¹⁹¹

How Shakespeare uses the story of this letter will be considered shortly.

¹⁸⁹ Shakespeare, op. cit., Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, pp. 1006-1049.

¹⁹⁰ Harrison, op. cit., "Introduction" to Hamlet, pp. 600-601.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 600.

The first letter incident in Hamlet occurs when Claudius, new King of Denmark, sends a diplomatic mission to the King of Norway.

King. We have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose . . .
And we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway . . .¹⁹²

The ambassadors return to report the success of their mission: that Norway has forced his nephew Fortinbras to give up any plans to attack Denmark, and only requests permission for him to pass peaceably through on his way to fight the Poles. Voltimand presents the reply to the King:

Volt. Most fair return of greetings, and desires.
Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew's levies, which to him appear'd
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But better look'd into, he truly found
It was against your Highness . . .
With an entreaty, herein further shown
That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise.¹⁹³

This exchange of letters of state with Norway plays no part in the action of the drama nor does it reveal any characterization; it does serve, however, to reveal the Danish foreign affairs situation and to prepare for the entrance of Fortinbras into the action later.

Hamlet, carrying a lonely burden of distress and indecision, turns to the gentle Ophelia for affection, but she has been so dominated

¹⁹²Shakespeare, op. cit., Hamlet, I, ii, ll. 27-30, 33-35.

¹⁹³Ibid., II, ii, ll. 60-65, 76-78.

by her father's narrow, restrictive authority that she is too timid and unsophisticated to understand Hamlet's love or his need.

Pol. What! have you given him any hard words of late?

Oph. No, my good lord; but, as you did command,
I did repel his letters and denied
His access to me.

Pol. That hath made him mad.¹⁹⁴

Ophelia obediently produces Hamlet's letters to her, which Polonius carries straight to the King and Queen as proof of his opinion that Hamlet is mad.

Pol. . . . now, gather, and surmise.
To the celestial, and my soul's idol; the beau-
tified Ophelia,

That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase, 'beautified'
is a vile phrase: but you shall hear. Thus:
In her excellent white bosom, these, &c.--

Queen. Came this from Hamlet to her?

Pol. Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.

Doubt thou the stars are fire;

Doubt that the sun doth move;

Doubt truth to be a liar;

But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia! I am ill at these numbers:
I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I
love thee best, O most best! believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst
this machine is to him.

HAMLET.

This in obedience hath my daughter shown me;
And more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

King.

But how hath she

Receiv'd his love?

Pol.

What do you think of me?¹⁹⁵

Does Hamlet's attempt at love letters reveal his intellectual

¹⁹⁴Ibid., II, i, ll. 107-110.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., II, ii, ll. 97-108-129.

honesty or his self-doubt? It seems the former; he makes a rather laughable effort to compose one of the conventional, fashionable billets-doux to one's lady, but his educated intelligence rebels at the conventional, insipid phraseology of groans and sighs and pierced hearts, etc., etc., and he frankly finds himself "ill at these numbers." In any case, it is a conscious spoof of the mannered phraseology of the courtly love letter.

The sympathetic Ophelia is forgivably incapable of understanding Hamlet, and her self-righteous, self-centered father's reaction shows inexcusable lack of either understanding or sympathy. How differently a suave, affectionate father (such as the Duke in Two Gentlemen of Verona) would have read these letters to his daughter! Furthermore, when the King asks how Ophelia received Hamlet's suit, Polonius' answer, "What do you think of me?" reveals with bitter irony his concern for appearances--for his "image," rather than his daughter's or Hamlet's problems.

The next use of letters is based on the only one in Hamlet's source. Hamlet tells his mother about the plan to send him on a mission to England with his former schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as companions.

Ham. I must to England. You know that?
Queen. Alack!
 I had forgot: 'tis so concluded on.
Ham. There's letters sealed; and my two
 schoolfellows,
 Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,
 They bear the mandate; . . .¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶Ibid., III, iv, ll. 200-204.

After the King has dispatched the two courtiers to escort Hamlet aboard ship, he thinks aloud of the request to the King of England in the sealed letters.

King. . . . --thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process, which imports at full,
By letters conjuring to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England;
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me.¹⁹⁷

The story of what happened on the voyage to England is told in a letter from Hamlet delivered by some sailors to his friend, Horatio.

Hor. Horatio, when thou shalt have over-
looked this, give these fellows some means to the
king; they have letters for him. Ere we were
two days old at sea, a pirate of very war-like
appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves
too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour;
in the grapple I boarded them: on the instant
they got clear of our ship, so I alone became
their prisoner. They have dealt with me like
thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did;
I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king
have the letters I have sent; and repair thou to
me with as much haste as thou wouldst fly
death. I have words to speak in thine ear will
make thee dumb; yet are they much too light
for the bore of the matter. These good fellows
will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and
Guiltenstern hold their course for England: of
them I have much to tell thee. Farewell.

He that thou knowest thine,
HAMLET

Come, I will give you way for these your letters;
And do't the speedier, that you may direct me
To him from whom you brought them.¹⁹⁸

The King is talking to Laertes, who is eager for revenge on

¹⁹⁷Ibid., IV, iii, ll. 65-70.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., IV, vi, ll. 13-36.

Hamlet for his father's (Polonius') murder and his sister's (Ophelia's) madness, when a messenger delivers Hamlet's letters addressed to the King and Queen.

Mess. Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.
 This to your majesty; this to the queen.
 King. From Hamlet! Who brought them?
 Mess. Sailors, my lord . . .
 King. Laertes, you shall hear them.
 Leave us. Exit Messenger.
Reads. High and mighty, you shall know I am set
naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I
beg leave to see your kingly eyes; when I shall,
first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the
occasions of my sudden and more strange re-
turn.

HAMLET.

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?
 Or is it some abuse and no such thing?

Laer. Know you the hand?

King. 'Tis Hamlet's character. 'Naked,'
 And in a postscript here, he says, 'alone.'
 Can you advise me?

Laer. I'm lost in it, my lord. But let him come.¹⁹⁹

After Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet gives Horatio the details of his substitution of the letter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were carrying to England.

Ham. Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
 That would not let me sleep. . . .

Up from my cabin,
 My sea gown scarf'd about me, in the dark
 Crop'd I to find out them, had my desire,
 Finger'd their packet, and in fine withdrew
 To mine own room again; making so bold--
 My fears forgetting manners--to unseal
 Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio,
 O royal knavery! an exact command,
 Larded with many several sorts of reasons,
 Importing Denmark's health and England's too,
 With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., IV, vii, ll. 36-39, 41-54.

That, on the supervise, no leisure bated,
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off.

Hor. Is't possible?

Ham. Here's the commission; read it at
more leisure

But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

Hor. I beseech you.

Ham. . . . --I sat me down,
Devis'd a new commission, wrote it fair;
I once did hold it, as our statist's do,
A baseness to write fair, and labor'd much
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know
The effect of what I wrote?

Hor. Aye, good my lord.

Ham. An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm should flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear,
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And many such-like 'As'es of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving-time allow'd.

Hor. How was this sealed?

Ham. Why, even in that was Heaven ordinant.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up in the form of the other,
Subscrib'd it, gave't th'impression, plac'd it safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea-fight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

Hor. So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't.

Ham. Why, man, they did make love to this employment;
They are not near my conscience; . . .²⁰⁰

The important letter to the King of England is not given verbatim,
but its substance is indicated by the two individuals most concerned--
its author and its proposed victim. Here the power of suggestion works
with double effect by both suggesting its actual contents and by also

²⁰⁰ Ibid., V, ii, ll. 4-5, 12-28, 31-58.

presenting the tortured emotions of each character: the King's groaning, "For like the hectic in my blood he rages," and Hamlet's hard-beset, "With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life."

Hamlet's substitution of letters is prepared for by the brief visit to the Queen before he sails (perhaps to learn if she may know of any plot against him?), during which he characterizes his fellow travelers as men whom he would trust as "adders fanged." The fawnings of these two sychophants would create in Hamlet's heart the "kind of fighting that would not let me sleep," and impel him to see the letter to England. His actual exchange of the letters is credible because of the realistic touches about writing in a "fair" hand, folding it just so, and placing on it the superscription and royal seal; they furnish information today of the style of Elizabethan letters of state. More interesting, however, are Hamlet's comments on the art of letter writing--that he had "labored much how to forget" his school boy learning of fair writing (Hamlet not a bookish introvert but normally a man of action?), and his ironic comments on the intricacies of diplomatic formulae, with its pun on the "'As'es."

Shakespeare's dramatic economy is exemplified by the portion of his source's letter episode which he did not use. His Hamlet does not go on to England and marry the King's daughter there; such a digression would break the chain of bloody events and lessen the impact of a tight plot; Hamlet does not even reach England, but by means of a dramatic pirate attack is enabled to startle the King by his unexpected return to Denmark. Also, if he had gone to England the actual execution of his

companions would have been necessitated; in Shakespeare's play, Hamlet's understatement that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England" and Horatio's brief comment, "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't" are more horrifying in their simple suggestion.

Finally, Hamlet's letter to Horatio is a model of clarity, directness, and terseness; it forms an excellent contrast to the circumlocutions of diplomatic correspondence, and also is evidence against some critical opinions that Hamlet is, temporarily at least, mad.

The last letters in the play are those of Hamlet to the King and Queen. One can only guess the contents and effect of the latter, but the two sentences comprising the one to the King are charged with irony and veiled threat--dramatic in tone and in the effect on the King.

If one aspect more than any other characterizes the letters in Hamlet, it appears to be their power of suggestion; in fact, of the play itself Dowden says, "Shakspeare created it a mystery, and therefore it is for ever suggestive . . .,"²⁰¹

Turning from the tragedy of the young Prince of Denmark to that of an old King of Britain, we find in King Lear (1606)²⁰² what is often regarded by critics as Shakespeare's greatest play, but one which is not often presented on the stage. Shakespeare's sources and their implications were recently discussed in an essay by Alfred Harbage from which the following extracts are quoted:

²⁰¹Edward Dowden, Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1892), p. 126.

²⁰²Shakespeare, op. cit., King Lear, pp. 1050-1090.

The story of Lear and his three daughters was given written form four centuries before Shakespeare's birth. . . . The figure of the ruler asking a question, often a riddle, with disastrous consequences to himself is equally old and dispersed. In his Historia Regum Britanniae (1136) Geoffrey of Monmouth converted folklore to history and established Lear and his daughters as rulers of ancient Britain, thus bequeathing them to the chronicles. Raphael Holinshed's (1587) . . . includes "Leir, sonne of Baldud," . . . He Shakespeare read the story also in John Higgins' lamentable verses in A Mirrour for Magistrates (1574), and in Edmund Spenser's Fairie Queene, II, 10, 27-32. He knew, and may even have acted in, a bland dramatic version, The True Chronicle History of King Leir, published anonymously in 1605 but staged at least as early as 1594. . . .

In its pre-Shakespearean forms, both those mentioned above and others, . . . all are alike in that they end happily for Lear, who is reconciled to Cordelia and restored to his throne.²⁰³

There is no mention of letters in Holinshed's Chronicles or in the stanzas which tell the story in The Fairie Queene, but four letters are used in Shakespeare's most immediate and only dramatic source, The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella,²⁰⁴ abbreviated hereinafter as Leir and His Daughters.

When the actions of the earlier play and of Shakespeare's King Lear are paralleled chronologically, both open with the scene in which the King distributes his realm, but the first letters are two which appear in the earlier play. It shows the King of Cornwall and the King of Cambria meeting at an inn, en route to Leir's castle, and comparing letters each has received from Leir.

²⁰³ Alfred Harbage, "King Lear: an Introduction," in Shakespeare: The Tragedies (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 114-115.

²⁰⁴ Anonymous, The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella, in Six Old Plays . . ., op. cit., II, 369-464.

Cornwall.

I am sure my haste's as great as yours:
 For I am sent for, to come unto king Leir,
 Who by these present letters promiseth
 His eldest daughter, lovely Gonorill,
 To me in marriage, and for present dowry,
 The moiety of halfe his regiment . . .²⁰⁵

Cambria replies that his letter is similar, promising him Leir's daughter, Ragan, and half the kingdom, and the future brothers-in-law wonder why the third sister, Cordella, has been left out. These letters are not necessary in Shakespeare's play because the two elder sisters are already married when the play begins, but they assume importance a little later in their own play. This occurs when Perillus (the equivalent to Shakespeare's Earl of Kent) and others in the court attempt to persuade Leir to give Cordella a share in his kingdom, and the King tells them he cannot because he has already "dispatched letters of contract" to Cambria and Cornwall, and to revoke the pledges of his daughters' dowries to them would cause him to "make shipwreck of our kingly word."²⁰⁶

The use of these letters creates a series of episodes in Leir and His daughters; Shakespeare, by omitting them, has gained in compression and power; also his Lear's wrath is not weakened by any indication of possible relenting were it not for previous written pledges.

The next letter, chronologically, occurs in Shakespeare's play, but not in his source. Edmund, the younger and bastard son of the Earl of Gloucester, uses a letter as the opening wedge in his plot to cause

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 391.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 395.

his father to disinherit his older and legitimate half-brother, Edgar.

He ends a bitter soliloquy:

Edm. Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. . . .²⁰⁷
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

When Gloucester enters, Edmund makes a show of pretending to hide the letter hastily; this arouses his father's curiosity, and Edmund cleverly leads him to demand to know its contents before, with feigned reluctance, he gives it to him to read:

Glo. This policy of reverence of age makes
the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps
our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot
relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond
bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who
sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered.
Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If
our father would sleep till I waked him, you
should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live
the beloved of your brother, EDGAR.--Hum!
Conspiracy! 'Sleep till I waked him, you should
enjoy half his revenue.'--My son Edgar! Had
he a hand to write this? a heart and brain to
breed it in? When came this to you? Who
brought it?

Edm. It was not brought to me, my lord;
there's the cunning of it; I found it thrown in
at the casement of my closet.²⁰⁸

This letter is a masterpiece of discreetly worded innuendo:

Gloucester's masculine pride would be stung at the imputation of senility (he had just recently boasted of the "good sport at his [Edmund's] making"); the implication of tyranny in this father whom Edmund admitted

²⁰⁷Shakespeare, op. cit., King Lear, I, ii, ll. 19-22.

²⁰⁸Ibid., ll. 50-67.

loved both his sons equally, and finally the suggestion of death in the "sleep" and the sons enjoying halves of his estate--all these aroused his anger, which Edmund increased while cleverly pretending to abate it. The letter predisposed Gloucester to be the victim of the remainder of Edmund's "inventions," and Edgar is tricked into hiding and later fleeing for his life. The secondary plot of Gloucester and his two sons reinforces the main plot of Lear and his three daughters, but where it was Lear's own wounded vanity which caused him to drive away his loyal daughter, it was Edmund's treachery which caused Gloucester to drive away his true son. Lear, like the protagonist of Greek tragedy, is the victim of his tragic flaw; Gloucester is the victim of his misbegotten son's revenge for his illegitimacy; both fathers have failed to understand their children.

The next letters occur in both plays when the old King, infuriated by his eldest daughter's treatment, goes to visit his next daughter, but there are differences both in the letters and the way in which they are used. In Leir and His Daughters, Cornwall is distressed by Leir's unexplained absence, hopes no unkindness has been offered him, and writes to learn if he has gone to visit Ragan, as Gonorill has suggested he might have done.

Cornwall.

I hope so too; but yet to be more sure,
Ile send a poste immediately to know
Whether he be arrived there or no.²⁰⁹

Gonorill intercepts her husband's messenger and, by means of a gift and promise of further rewards, gets him to agree to carry out her

²⁰⁹. . . King Leir and His Three Daughters, op. cit., p. 409.

plans.

Gonorill.

. . . instead of carrying the king's letter to my father, carry thou these letters to my sister, which containe matter quite contrary to the other: there she shall be given to understand, that my father hath detracted her, given out slaunderous speeches against her: and that he hath most intolerably abused me, set my lord and me at variance, and made mutinies amongst the commons. These things (although it be not so) Yet thou must affirme them to be true,

* * *

If my sister thinketh convenient, as my letters importeth, to make him away, hast thou the heart to effect it?²¹⁰

When the messenger delivers the letter he comments on the outward signs of Ragan's reaction to it--how she flushes with anger, "how she knits her brow, and bites her lips, And stamps," and Ragan's verbal comments reveal more of the letter's contents: a warning that Leir plans to cause trouble between her and her husband, and the suggestion that the messenger will carry out any plot she may devise. She at once asks him:

Ragan.

Hast thou the heart to act a stratagem,
And give a stabbe or two, if need require?

Messenger.

I have a heart compact of adamant,
Which never knew what melting pitty meant.
I weigh no more the murdring of a man,
Than I respect the cracking of a flea,²¹¹
When I do catch him biting on my skin.

The last lines of the messenger's speech are echoed by Shake-

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 412.

²¹¹Ibid., pp. 416-417.

Shakespeare's Gloucester:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.²¹²

Regan's ultimate cruelty is shown in her determination to use
Gonorill's letter to break her father's heart before she takes his life;
she instructs the messenger who has agreed to murder him:

But yet, before thou prosecute the act,
Shew him the letter, which my sister sent;
There let him read his owne inditement first,
And then proceed to execution.²¹³

One would expect Shakespeare to have used this letter, which is
so dramatically effective in both plot and characterization, but instead
he substitutes two letters of less dramatic power. The first of these
is a letter which Goneril has not written herself, but has had her stew-
ard, Oswald, write to Regan, apparently concerning Lear's anger at the
treatment he and his knights have received, and warning her of his
forthcoming visit to her.

Gon. What he hath utter'd I have writ my sister;
If she sustain him and his hundred knights,
When I have show'd the unfitness,--

Re-enter OSWALD.

How now, Oswald!
What! have you writ that letter to my sister?

Osw. Ay, madam.

Gon. Take you some company, and away to horse:
Inform her full of my particular fear;
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more . . .²¹⁴

²¹²Shakespeare, op. cit., King Lear, IV, i, ll. 36-37.

²¹³. . . King Lear and His Three Daughters, op. cit., p. 421.

²¹⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., King Lear, I, iv, ll. 356-364.

Shakespeare's Goneril has asked her messenger to add verbal details to reinforce her letter, just as her counterpart in the earlier play had done, but this letter apparently contained no such outright lies, nor any suggestion that their father be murdered; furthermore, it is not used later by Regan to cut Lear to the heart; Shakespeare's Goneril does that herself, in person, when next she sees her father again. Nevertheless, by not using the more dramatic letter of the older play, with its emphasis on treachery and murder, Shakespeare retains unimpaired his central theme of ingratitude as the force which destroys Lear.

In Leir and His Daughters, Leir goes to Regan without writing her in advance; in Shakespeare's play, Lear sends Kent with a message to Regan, who with her husband is visiting the Earl of Gloucester, to announce his coming.

Lear. Go you before to Gloucester with these letters. Acquaint my daughter no further with any thing you know then comes from her demand out of the letter. If your diligence be not speedy I shall be there before you.²¹⁵

Lear retains too much dignity to ask a servant (which is Kent's disguise) to volunteer verbal support of his letter, as his daughter had done in both plays, and we can only guess that its contents are similar to those of a previous letter to Regan which she mentions to Gloucester:

Reg. Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,
Of differences, which I least thought it fit
To answer [away] from home.²¹⁶

²¹⁵Ibid., I, v, ll. 1-5.

²¹⁶Ibid., II, i, ll. 124-126.

She has apparently not only not answered her father's letter, but does not mean to be at home if he should come to visit her without an expected invitation. She does not intend to have the expense of maintaining Lear's knights, she tells Gloucester.

Reg. I have this present evening from my sister
Been well-inform'd of them, and with such cautions
That if they come to sojourn at my house,
I'll not be there.²¹⁷

Kent, with Lear's letter to Regan, arrives at the entrance to Gloucester's castle at the same time that Oswald does, and challenges him:

Kent. Draw, you rascal; you come with letters against the king, and take vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father.
Draw, you rogue . . .²¹⁸

Their fight is interrupted by Cornwall and Gloucester, and Cornwall has Kent put in stocks although even Gloucester echoes Kent's outraged threat that to dishonor the King's messenger is to dishonor the King himself. While Kent spends the night in the stocks he longs for the sun to rise so that he can read a letter he has received:

That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter! . . .
I know 'tis from Cordelia,
Who hath most fortunately been informed
Of my obscured course; and shall find time
From this enormous state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies.²¹⁹

²¹⁷Ibid., ll. 103-106.

²¹⁸Ibid., II, ii, ll. 39-42.

²¹⁹Ibid., ll. 171-177.

Shakespeare's insertion of the letter from Cordelia to Kent is not explained at this point, and we are not told how or when Kent received it, nor if he read it before Lear's arrival, but its contents are revealed later.

When Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle in the morning he is enraged to find his messenger in the stocks, and even more enraged when Kent tells him what had happened: that he had gone to Regan's castle and was kneeling to deliver Lear's letter to her when Oswald had ridden up "half-breathless, panting forth From Goneril his mistress salutations," and delivered her letters; that Regan and Cornwall had read her letters, immediately gathered a company and ridden off, without reading Lear's letter; that he had followed them in another attempt to deliver his letters, again encountered Oswald, fought him, and so was being punished. At Lear's outraged insistence, Gloucester succeeds in persuading Regan to see her father; she advises him to go back to Goneril and beg her pardon, Goneril arrives in accordance with her letter to Regan, and the two sisters join in casting their father off. In spite of Gloucester's protests, Lear goes out into the night and the storm with only his Fool for company, but he is soon followed by Kent, whom Gloucester has freed from the stocks.

While searching in the storm for Lear, Kent encounters a gentleman friendly to his master, reveals to him the contents of the message he had received—that rescue forces from France under Cordelia and her husband (the King of France) are landing at Dover—and begs him to go there and report to her what has happened.

Meanwhile Gloucester bewails to Edmund that even in his own castle Goneril and Regan had refused to allow him to give Lear shelter, and tells him of a certain letter he has received.

Glo. I have received a letter this night;
'tis dangerous to be spoken; I have locked the
letter in my closet. These injuries the king now
bears will be revenged home; there's part of
a power already footed; we must incline to the
king. I will seek him and privily relieve him;
go you and maintain talk with the duke, that
my charity be not of him perceived. If he ask
for me, I am ill and gone to bed.²²⁰

When Gloucester has gone to find and bring relief to Lear, Edmund seizes his opportunity to get both his older brother and his father out of the way so that he may inherit the title and lands at once. He takes the secret letter to Cornwall, telling him that his brother had brought it to his father, and that both of them are in the plot with France to restore Lear's kingdom. Cornwall condemns both as traitors, confers the title of Gloucester on Edmund, and tells Goneril to send a message to the Duke of Albany.

Corn. Post speedily to my lord your husband.
Show him this letter. The army of France is landed.
Seek out the traitor Gloucester.²²¹

Gloucester is captured, Cornwall, Goneril, and Regan question him about the secret letter from Cordelia, and savagely have his eyes put out; a servant wounds Cornwall in trying to stop him, and is himself killed by Regan. When Gloucester is driven, blind, from his own castle, he cries

²²⁰Ibid., III, iii, ll. 10-18.

²²¹Ibid., III, vii, ll. 1-3.

out that his son Edmund will revenge him; but Regan deals him the ultimate blow by telling him that it was Edmund himself who had betrayed him.

The secret letter from Cordelia which Edmund used to destroy his father is quite different, and differently handled, from the letter from Cordella in Leir and His Daughters. In that play Cordella's ambassador arrives with letters and presents for her father; Cornwall (who does not know his wife's plot against her father) says that Leir is away for several days and invites the ambassador to wait there for him, or to leave his letters and gifts with them for delivery; the ambassador insists he must deliver them personally and goes on to Cambria to look for Leir. Cambria becomes worried when the ambassador says Leir was not with Cornwall, where Gonorill said he had gone, and Cordella, having received no word from her ambassador, lands with troops from France. Meanwhile, Gonorill's and Regan's messenger who had promised to kill Leir and Perillus comes upon them asleep at the obscure trysting place where Regan had falsely said she would meet them.

Messenger.

Now could I stab them bravely, while they sleepe,
And in a maner put them to no paine;
And doing so, I shew them mighty friendship:
For feare of death is worse than death itselke.
But that my sweet queene will'd me for to shew
This letter to them, ere I did the deed.²²²

When the old men awaken and the messenger tells them he has been sent to murder them, Leir thinks he has been sent by Cordella in revenge for his treatment of her, and will not believe that it was Gonorill and

²²² . . . King Leir and His Three Daughters, op. cit., p. 426.

Ragan who had hired his assassin.

Leir.

Oh, but assure me by some certaine token,
That my two daughters hired thee to this deed:
If I were resolv'd of that, then I
Would wish no longer life, but crave to die.

* * *

Messenger.

. . . let this paper witness for them all.
/Shewes Gonorill's letter. ²²³

Leir begs the messenger to kill him but spare his friend's life, and Perillus counters this with a plea that he may die but Leir go free; both old men's repeated assurances that God will punish murder are reinforced each time by the thunder claps of an approaching storm; finally, either because of fear of heavenly punishment, pity for the two old men each willing to die for the other, or the bag of gold they give him, the messenger departs leaving them unharmed. Later Cordella arrives with her husband, the King of France, who accuses Gonorill and Ragan of attempting to murder their father; Ragan denies it but Leir produces the proof of their guilt:

Leir.

Out upon thee, viper, scum, filthy parricide,
More odious to my sight than is a toade:
Knowest thou these letters? /She snatches
and teares them. ²²⁴

This is the fourth and last dramatic use to which the unknown author of Leir and His Daughters puts this letter. It was first used to depict Gonorill's character and to initiate the plot against Leir's life;

²²³Ibid., p. 431.

²²⁴Ibid., p. 462.

it was then used by Hagan to show contemptuously to Leir his eldest daughter's hatred of him, and by the messenger to refrain from killing him in his sleep; and in the end the wheel has come round full cycle as it is used by Leir to convict his two older daughters of their guilt.

The remaining letters occur only in Shakespeare's play. Oswald has carried Goneril's message to her husband Albany, along with the secret letter to Gloucester, and being questioned by Albany, has revealed what had taken place at Gloucester's castle. When Goneril arrives her husband treats her with scorn and horror. A messenger arrives with a letter from Regan announcing Cornwall's death from the wound inflicted by Gloucester's servant, and urging help to repel the French, but when Goneril leaves to write an answer, Albany learns from the messenger that it was Edmund's treachery that ruined Gloucester and says he will live to revenge it. Next we see Kent in the French camp at Dover, where the gentleman who carried Kent's letters to Cordelia describes to him her reaction to them.

Gent. . . . she took them, read them in my presence,
And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek; it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

Kent. O! then it mov'd her.

Gent. Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove
Which should express her goodliest. . . .

* * *

Kent. Made she no verbal question?

Gent. Faith, once or twice she heav'd the name
of 'father'

Pantingly forth, as if it pressed her heart;
Cried, 'Sisters! sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters!
. . . What, i' the storm? i' the night?
Let pity not be believed!' . . .

then away she started
To deal with grief alone.²²⁵

Cordelia's reactions to Kent's letters reveal her tenderness and sympathy, and also her strong self-control and dignity--all in dramatic contrast to her sisters' heartlessness, uncontrollable rage (as at Gloucester), and complete lack of dignity before their servants.

There are four more letters in King Lear. Oswald has come to Gloucester's castle to deliver a note from Goneril to Edmund, who is not there. Regan suspects the truth of her sister's relationship with Edmund and that she is planning to get rid of her husband, Albany, so she can marry Edmund. Regan tries without success to get Oswald to give the letter to her, but does persuade him to carry a letter to Edmund for her also by reminding him that she as a widow is the one who is free to marry Edmund.

Reg. . . . I do advise you, take this note.
My lord is dead, Edmund and I have talk'd,
And more convenient is he for my hand
Than for your lady's. You may gather more.
If you do find him, pray you give him this.

* * *

If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor [Gloucester],
Preferment falls on him who cuts him off.²²⁶

Oswald comes upon Gloucester and, obedient to Regan's wishes, tries to kill him, but instead is killed by Edgar, who is protecting his father. Oswald, not recognizing Edgar (in disguise), makes a dying request of him:

²²⁵Shakespeare, op. cit., King Lear, IV, iii, ll. 13-19, 26-31, 33-34.

²²⁶Ibid., IV, v, ll. 29-33, 37-38.

quest of him:

Osw. . . . give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund Earl of Gloucester: seek him out
Upon the English party. O! untimely death. Dies.

* * *

Edg. Let's see his pockets: these letters that he speaks
of
May be my friends. . . .

Let us see:
Leave, gentle wax; and manners, blame us not:
To know our enemies' minds, we'd rip their hearts;
Their papers, is more lawful.

Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. You
have many opportunities to cut him off; if
your will want not, time and place will be
fruitfully offered. There is nothing done if he
return conqueror; then am I the prisoner,
and his bed my gaol; from the loathed warmth
whereof deliver me, and supply the place for
your labor.

Your--wife, so I would say--
Affectionate servant,
GONERIL.

O undistinguished space of woman's will!
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life,
And the exchange my brother!²²⁷

Edgar gives the letter to the Duke of Albany just before the
battle between the English forces under the Duke and Edmund against the
invading French under Cordelia. Edmund's troops capture Cordelia and
Lear, and as they are led away Edmund gives a soldier a note:

Edm. Come hither, captain; hark,
Take thou this note; [Giving a paper.] go follow
them to prison:

One step I have advanc'd thee; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes;

* * *

Mark,--I say, instantly, and carry it so
As I have set it down.²²⁸

²²⁷Ibid., IV, vi, ll. 255-257, 261-281.

²²⁸Ibid., V, ii, ll. 27-31, 37-38.

The written instructions are for the execution of Cordelia.

After the battle is over Albany accuses Edmund of treachery, and Edgar is given the promised opportunity to accept his brother's challenge that he is not a traitor. When Edmund falls, Goneril claims he has been tricked, but she is checked by her husband:

Alb. Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper shall I stop it. Hold, sir:
Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil:
No tearing, lady; I perceive you know it.²²⁹

Realizing that her letter has brought about Edmund's death, Goneril goes out and commits suicide. Before Edmund dies, he does his one good deed:

Edm. I pant for life: some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.
Nay, send in time.

* * *

He [the Captain] hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison yard, and
To lay the blame upon her own despair,²³⁰

In all, there are twelve letters in King Lear, only one of which parallels a letter in Leir and His Daughters--the one from the oldest daughter when the King leaves her to go to her sister. The repeated dramatic use of that letter in the earlier play has been noted, but the corresponding letter in Shakespeare is of relatively less importance. Five of the letters in Shakespeare's play are concerned with characters in the secondary plot of the Gloucesters, who are not a part of the earlier play. It is interesting to note that King Lear and Julius Caesar

²²⁹Ibid., V, iii, ll. 156-159.

²³⁰Ibid., ll. 245-249, 254-256.

contain more letters than any other of Shakespeare's plays, and that many of these letters are used in connection with the secret plans and conspiracies which play a large part in the plot of each; the effect is almost that of a modern spy drama. All the letters in King Lear reveal character and move plot, but there seem to be almost too many of them; they whirl about like the elements of the wild storm in the midst of which Lear and his poor Fool wander.

Macbeth (ca. 1606)²³¹ is a tragedy based on Holinshed's Chronicles, with some original additions by Shakespeare with the purpose, suggests Stopford A. Brooke, of pleasing the new King who was now the patron of Shakespeare's company.

The variations and additional matter he introduced, as for example the character of Banquo, suggest his desire to please James I. The part the witches are made to bear is perhaps an indirect compliment to the king's views on witchcraft. Then Banquo was said to be an ancestor of James, and Banquo is the noblest character in the play. . . . It seems an incredible resemblance, but a poet who, like Shakespeare, was also a practical man of the world, may well be excused for this.²³²

The story of Macbeth was told in Holinshed's Chronicles in Book II, The History of Scotland, sections 168-176, but the description of the murder of the Duncan follows the more dramatic account of a different royal murder, that of Duff by Donwald, in the same volume, sections 150-151. Holinshed records only one use of letters:

Soone after, Makduffe, repairing to the borders of Scotland, addressed his letters with secret dispatch vnto the nobles of the realme, declaring how Malcome was confederate with him, to come

²³¹Shakespeare, op. cit., Macbeth, pp. 978-1005.

²³²Stopford A. Brooke, On Ten Plays of Shakespeare (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1905), p. 180.

hastilie to Scotland to claime the crowne, and therefore he required them, sith he was right inheritor thereto, to assist him with their powers to recouer the same out of the hands of the wrongful vsurper.²³³

Shakespeare follows the Chronicles in the story of MacDuff's flight to England where he and Malcolm joined forces to invade Scotland and kill Macbeth, but he does not mention these letters.

The only letter in Shakespeare's play is the one written by Macbeth to Lady Macbeth to tell her about the three witches and their prophecies concerning him. Inasmuch as this scene has already taken place on the stage, the letter does not fall in the category of those used to report on action which is not portrayed in a previous scene; it is therefore unnecessary to supply background material essential to the plot. Why, then, does Shakespeare insert it? A look at the letter itself and the reaction of the recipient may provide an answer.

Lady Macbeth receives the letter from her husband shortly before he returns from a victorious battle against forces invading Scotland.

Enter LADY MACBETH, reading a letter.
They met me in the day of success; and I
have learned by the perfectest report, they
have more in them than mortal knowledge.
When I burned in desire to question them fur-
ther, they made themselves air, into which they
vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of
it, came missives from the king, who all-hailed
me, 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title, before,
these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me
to the coming-on of time, with, 'Hail, king that
shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver

²³³ Raphael Holinshed, Holinshed's Chronicle as Used in Shakespeare's Plays, edited by Allardyce & Josephine Nicoll (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1927), p. 221.

thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.²³⁴

This letter presents several slight but distinct insights into the chief characters of the play: Macbeth himself is already interested in greatness, and his belief that his wife shares that interest is confirmed by her reactions to his letter, which show an equal insight on her part into his character.

This married couple understand each other, but not themselves. In the end it will be she who breaks, but at the moment it is her driving power which impels her to the swift decision that they should "catch the nearest way."

Lady M. Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way; thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it; what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;'
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.²³⁵

She is conscious of her husband's good qualities, but the fact that she considers them evidences of weakness is the most powerful key to her own

²³⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., Macbeth, I, v, ll. 1-15.

²³⁵Ibid., ll. 16-31.

ruthlessness; thus Shakespeare, by having Lady Macbeth's estimate of her husband's character depict even more vividly her own, shows his own dramatic--as opposed to narrative or simple descriptive--technique of character portrayal.

Lady Macbeth begins to use the "valor of her tongue" on her husband the moment he walks in the castle.

Enter MACBETH.

Lady M. Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.²³⁶

Perhaps Macbeth was not innocent of the effect his letter would have on Lady Macbeth; he knew what would please her and may have wanted her to supply the drive to achieve it.

Stopford Brooke assigns a special and, as it were, supernatural role to Macbeth's letter. In discussing the witches who open the play and set the mood for its action, he says:

These spiritual creatures, as he [Shakespeare] conceived them, had chiefly to do with nature; were either embodiments of its elemental forces, or their masters. Such were Oberon and Ariel, but they had most to do with the beneficent forces of nature. Here the Weird Sisters command its evil forces. . . . I hold that it is incredible that Shakespeare should have taken up witches into his tragedy and left them as James I and the rest of the world commonly conceived them. His imagination was far too intense, his representing power much too exacting, to allow him to leave them unidealized. . . . Elemental beings! inhabiting the world of nature beyond our senses . . . the witches have influence also on the soul, but only the soul that has admitted evil to dwell in it. . . . They master the thoughts of Macbeth because they are in tune with them. . . .

²³⁶Ibid., ll. 55-59.

Then, again, they hand on their power of doubting evil in the evil soul through Macbeth's letter to Lady Macbeth. The murder they have half-suggested to Macbeth jumps with the murder in her heart . . . when she receives his letter and conceives at once the murderous means to reach the throne. . . . She feels the wicked influence of the Weird Sisters, though she has never seen them.²³⁷

Thus Brooke sees the letter as the instrument through which the baleful power of these supernatural forces of evil is transmitted to Lady Macbeth, and she responds by calling for the "metaphysical aid" of the "spirits That tend on mortal thoughts!"²³⁸

In summary, Macbeth's letter provides the dramatic instrument for superb characterization of the principals of the tragedy, especially for those elements in their characters which will drive them to their tragic deeds. One may consider the Weird Sisters as an external, deus ex machina technique--a gimmick of contemporary popular interest, if you please--to set the mood and motivate the action of the play, or as a great poet's imaginative embodiment of supernatural forces of evil evoking evil where they find it in a man's and his wife's souls; in either case the letter brings into focus the elemental tragic fault of grasping ambition in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth--a motivation based on internal, human responsibility which is more subtle, more universal, and more powerful.

The letters in the four tragedies selected as representative of this dark period of Shakespeare's career have several characteristics in

²³⁷Stopford A. Brooke, op. cit., pp. 184-186.

²³⁸Shakespeare, op. cit., Macbeth, I, v, ll. 30, 41-42.

common. In the first place, a greater proportion of them are Shakespeare's own creation. In the preceding period one-fourth of the letters were based on his sources, while in this period only about one-eighth of them were, and some of these were so transformed as to bear little resemblance to their originals; for example, Criseyde's last letter to Troilus, with its beauty which held his heart in spite of her "slydyng of corage," was transformed by Shakespeare into "Words, words, mere words" which infuriated his disillusioned Troilus. In this respect the letters also reflect Shakespeare's increased independence of his sources in other ways as well, such as the complete change of mood in his Troilus and Cressida and his discarding of the happy ending which had been given in all previous sources of the story of King Lear. His sources have become less a story to be put into dramatic form and more a springboard for his fertile imagination.

Some of the letters in this period, furthermore, are more charged with philosophical implications. The letter which Ulysses reads in Troilus and Cressida does not merely influence Ajax's course of action, but it also weighs the value and influence of reputation; Edmund's forged letter in King Lear suggests the recurring problems of youth versus age; there is a fine parody in Hamlet of the diplomatic double talk and double dealing underlying international relations.

Finally, while Shakespeare continues to use letters as an effective instrument of characterization, the letters in these four tragedies probe more deeply into the darker recesses of the soul, illuminating them with a sort of shining darkness.

IV. "ON THE HEIGHTS," 1609-11

Shakespeare's period of bitter gloom was followed by a period of serenity in which the painful tragedies gave way to dramatic romances characterized by reunions, reconciliations, and the restoration of lost persons and position. It is tempting to search for the autobiographical background of this change in the character of his plays, but this is as elusive as it is with his sonnets. Whatever their personal significance might be, in the dramas the madness of Lear has been replaced by the wisdom of Prospero.

Of the four romances the first, Pericles, Prince of Tyre, was not included in the First Folio and is generally considered to have been only partially the work of Shakespeare, and the last and greatest, The Tempest, contains no letters.

Cymbeline (ca. 1609-10)²³⁹ was probably the first product of Shakespeare's semi-retirement when he began to spend more of his time in Stratford. It was included in the First Folio and, basing their judgment on internal evidence, most critics believe that the greater part of the play was written by Shakespeare, but that some portions were added by, or left by him to be filled in by, an unknown collaborator. An English actor, playwright, and critic, the late Harley Granville-Barker, prefaces a long discussion of this subject with a statement of what is generally considered to be definitely the work of Shakespeare.

²³⁹Shakespeare, op. cit., Cymbeline, pp. 1172-1213.

As for collaboration; we shall not deny Imogen to Shakespeare, nor Iachimo, the one done with such delight, the other, while he sways the plot, with exceeding skill. Here is not the master merely, but the past-master working at his ease. Much besides seems to bear his stamp, from Cloten to that admirable Gaoler. Was he content, in his leisure, to set his stamp on such a counterfeit as the dissembling tyrant Queen? There is slick professional competence about the writing of her, one may own. And how far is he guilty of the inept lapses, with which the play is undeniably stained?

It is pretty poor criticism . . . to fasten all the faults upon some unknown collaborator and allow one's adored Shakespeare all the praise.²⁴⁰

Granville-Barker then discusses the various portions that do not seem to have been written by Shakespeare, and which he says "certainly have a very tinny ring." The possibility that any of the letters may fall into this category will be considered in this study.

Some of the difficulties posed by Cymbeline arise from the fact that it is based on two widely disparate sources. The main theme or plot was taken from a fourteenth century Italian tale in Boccaccio's Decameron (ca. 1353),²⁴¹ while the setting, the struggles of the ancient Britons against their Roman invaders, came from seven episodes in Holinshed's Chronicles. From the latter we have the story of King Kymberline or Cimbeline, who reigned in the days of Augustus Caesar, of fighting not between Cimbeline but between his son Guiderius and the Romans, and of a battle between the Scots and the Danes which supplies material for

²⁴⁰Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927-1945), I, 459.

²⁴¹Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. by Richard Aldington (Garden City, N. Y.: Garden City Books, 1949).

Shakespeare's battle between the Britons and the Romans.²⁴² In spite of the resulting inconsistencies and anachronisms Cymbeline is unified by its theme--that of married chastity.

There are no letters in the episodes from Holinshed, but there are both a reference to letters and an important letter in the Decameron. The ninth tale of the second day--a story told to illustrate married chastity--begins with a discussion among a group of Italian merchants gathered in Paris on business. All agree that wives will play when husbands are away except Bernabo Lomellin da Genova, who insists that his wife, Madonna Zinevra, is not only beautiful and accomplished, but the very model of virtue and chastity. One of the merchants, a young man named Ambrogiuolo da Piacenza, challenges this statement, maintaining "if I were near your most chaste wife, I think I could very soon bring her to the point where I have already brought others."

Bernabo replied angrily: ". . . I am ready to have my head cut off if you can ever bring her to commit this act with you. And if you can't, I will not make you lose more than a thousand gold florins."

Ambrogiuolo began to grow heated, and said:

"Bernabo, . . . put five thousand florins (which should be less valuable to you than your head) against my thousand. You set no time limit, but I will agree to go to Genoa and within three months from the day I leave here I will have my will of your wife, . . . and will give you such proofs that you yourself will admit them, on condition, however, that during that period you do not go to Genoa and do not write her any information about this matter."²⁴³

²⁴²Holinshed, op. cit., I, 229-233.

²⁴³Boccaccio, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

In Shakespeare's play, the first mention of letters occurs when Posthumus Leonatus, a poor but worthy young gentleman of Cymbeline's court, is banished as punishment for his secret marriage with Imogen, Cymbeline's daughter by his first wife, and he tells Imogen goodbye.

Post. I will remain
The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth.
My residence in Rome at one Philario's,
Who to my father was a friend, to me
Known but by letter; thither write, my queen,
And with mine eyes I'll drink the words you send,²⁴⁴

This request for Imogen to write to him is a normal one for a husband to make, and suggests that letters may continue to unite them although they are being separated by his banishment. It is worthy of note that Posthumus is so confident of his wife's honor that, although he pledges his loyalty to her, it does not appear to occur to him to ask a similar pledge in return (as, for example, Troilus did).

Posthumus leaves written instructions with his faithful servant, Pisanio, to carry out the commands that Imogen might wish to give him, and she gives him a standing order:

Imo. I would thou grew'st unto the shores of the haven,
And question'dst every sail: if he should write,
And I not have it, 'twere a paper lost,
As offer'd mercy is.²⁴⁵

She is as anxious to receive letters from Posthumus as he is to get letters from her.

In Rome Posthumus proves himself a loyal, if somewhat tactless,

²⁴⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., Cymbeline, I, i, ll. 95-100.

²⁴⁵Ibid., I, iii, ll. 1-4.

young husband. His boasts that his wife's faithfulness surpasses that of the ladies of France and Italy irritate a Frenchman and an Italian, and the Italian, Iachimo, makes a wager with him similar to the wager Boccaccio's Ambrogiulio made with Bernabo, but with two significant differences. Their wager on both sides was in gold, but Iachimo insists that his wager be in gold ducats against Posthumus' diamond ring. The second difference is that while Ambrogiulio had stated Bernabo must not write his wife anything about the matter, Iachimo sets up as a condition of his wager that Posthumus must write a letter of introduction for him.

Iach. . . . If I bring you
no sufficient testimony that I have enjoyed the
dearest bodily part of your mistress, my ten
thousand ducats are yours; so is your diamond
too: if I come off, and leave her in such honour
as you have trust in, she your jewel, this your
jewel, and my gold are yours; provided I have
your commendation for my more free entertain-
ment.²⁴⁶

The "commendation" gives Iachimo a definite advantage over his counterpart in Boccaccio's tale because it guarantees him a friendly welcome by Imogen, who greets him as a visitor sponsored by her husband himself when Pisanio presents him.

Pis. Madam, a noble gentleman of Rome,
Comes from my lord with letters.

Iach. Change you, madam?
The worthy Leonatus is in safety,
And greets your highness dearly. Presents a letter.

Imo. Thanks, good sir:
You are kindly welcome.

* * *

²⁴⁶Ibid., I, iv, ll. 165-173.

He is one of the noblest men, to whose kindnesses I am most infinitely tied. Reflect upon him accordingly, as you value your truest
LEONATUS.

So far I read aloud;
But even the very middle of my heart
Is warm'd by the rest, and takes it thankfully.
You are as welcome, worthy sir, as I
Have words to bid you; and shall find it so
In all that I can do.²⁴⁷

Iachimo's "Change you, madam?" apparently refers to an innocent blush of happiness on Imogen's cheek, a touching testimony to her delight in receiving her husband's letters. The contents of the private letter are revealed only by suggestion: "even the very middle of my heart is warm'd by the rest." The stated contents of the letter of introduction reflect great credit on Posthumus Leonatus' confidence in his wife, but little credit on his judgment and common sense. Iachimo takes full advantage of the friendly welcome given him because of the letter, but his fulsome flattery annoys Imogen, and his insinuations concerning her husband's gay pleasures in Italy anger her; she pardons Iachimo only when he claims to have been merely testing her. When she is requested to provide protection overnight for the trunk in which Iachimo says her husband has an interest, the letter of introduction makes it almost obligatory that she agree. The letter appears to serve a double purpose: first, by giving Iachimo every advantage Shakespeare emphasizes more strongly Imogen's virtue; and secondly, it helps the villain to carry out his substitute plan to win his wager by guile if direct approaches should fail.

²⁴⁷Ibid., I, vi, ll. 10-14, 22-31.

To provide himself with further proof that he has been to Britain and seen Imogen, Iachimo has volunteered to carry a letter for her, "if you please To greet your lord with writing."²⁴⁸ He uses this letter with added advantage when he returns to Rome. Posthumus will not believe him when he claims to have won the wager, the description of Imogen's bedroom he says Iachimo must have obtained from some relation, and when shown the bracelet stolen from her arm, he grows pale but maintains that Imogen must have sent it to him:

Post. May be she pluck'd it off
To send to me.
Iach. She writes so to you, doth she?
Post. O! no, no, no, 'tis true.²⁴⁹

The fact that the letter which Iachimo brought to Posthumus from Imogen did not mention sending him the bracelet--a fact which the clever Italian brought out with such sly triumph--provided the telling blow; Posthumus handed over the ring he had wagered, nothing his friend Philario could say could convince him that Imogen was not unfaithful, and he storms off, swearing "to tear her limb-meal."

In Boccaccio's tale Madonna Zinevra is not tempted personally by Ambrogiulio at all, and the chest in which he gains access to her bedroom is sent there at the request of a neighbor woman whom he bribed for the purpose. In both novella and drama the husband's reaction to "proofs" of his wife's infidelity is the same: each writes a letter

²⁴⁸Ibid., II, 205-206.

²⁴⁹Ibid., II, iv, II, 104-106.

telling his wife to meet him at a certain place, a place where the husband has planned her murder. In Boccaccio's story--

Ambrogiulio was paid in full. Bernabo then left Paris and returned to Genoa full of rage against his wife. When he came near the town, he would not enter it, but went to an estate he possessed about twenty miles away. He then sent a servant whom he trusted to Genoa with two horses and a letter, informing his wife that he had returned and telling her to come to him; but he secretly ordered the servant to kill the lady in some suitable place, and then to return to him. The servant reached Genoa and gave the letter and the message, which the lady joyfully received.²⁵⁰

On their way to meet her husband the servant tells Madonna Zinevra of his orders to kill her, but allows her to escape when she promises to leave the country; he then falsely reports to Bernabo that his orders have been carried out.

In Cymbeline two letters are necessary to carry out the corresponding stratagem. Bernabo was able to give his servant verbal instructions, but Posthumus has to send written instructions to Pisanio along with his letter to Imogen asking her to meet him. Pisanio's horrified comments reveal simultaneously both his reaction to the message and the nature of its contents.

Enter PISANIO, reading a letter.

Pis. How! of adultery! Wherefore write you not
What monster's her accuser?

* * *

How! that I should murder her?
Upon the love and truth and vows which I
Have made to thy command? I, her? her blood?
If it be so to do good service, never
Let me be counted serviceable.

* * *

²⁵⁰Boccaccio, op. cit., p. 119.

--Do't: the letter
That I have sent her by her own command
Shall give thee opportunity: --O damn'd paper!
Black as the ink that's on thee.

* * *

Enter IMOGEN.

Imo. How now, Pisanio?

Pis. Madam, here is a letter from my lord.²⁵¹

Imogen chatters excitedly as she opens the letter to her, and then she reads it:

Justice, and your father's wrath, should he
take me in his dominion, could not be so cruel to
me, as you, O dearest of creatures, would not
even renew me with your eyes. Take notice that
I am in Cambria, at Milford-Haven; what
your own love will out of this advise you, fol-
low. So, he wishes you all happiness, that re-
mains loyal to his vow, and your, increasing in
love.
 LEONATUS POSTHUMUS.

O! for a horse with wings! Hear'st thou, Pisanio?
 He is at Milford-Haven; read, and tell me
 How far 'tis thither.²⁵²

Imogen's excitement and happiness are intense; while she makes plans for slipping away to Milford-Haven, she repeatedly asks Pisanio how far it is and how long it will take them to get there. Her reaction to Posthumus' request to meet him shows her whole-hearted love for her husband; she hardly seems to hear the reluctant Pisanio's advice, "Madam, you're best consider." Her chance to go to Posthumus seems particularly opportune because Cloten, the oafish son of her stepmother by a former husband, has been importuning her with insistent, unwelcome advances.

²⁵¹ Shakespeare, op. cit., Cymbeline, III, ii, ll. 1-2, 11-15, 17-20, 24-25.

²⁵² Ibid., ll. 40-51.

When Imogen and Pisanio reach their destination the servant reveals to her the contents of his master's letter to him, and to the audience her reactions to it.

Imo. . . . Pisanio! man!
Where is Posthumus? What is in thy mind,
That makes thee stare thus? Wherefore breaks that sigh
From the inward of thee?

* * *

Pis. Please you, read;
And you shall find me, wretched man, a thing
Most disdain'd of fortune.

Imo. Thy mistress, Pisanio, hath played the
strumpet in my bed; the testimonies whereof
lie bleeding in me. I speak not out of weak
surmises, but from proof as strong as my grief
and as certain as I expect my revenge. That
part thou, Pisanio, must act for me, if thy faith
be not tainted with the breach of hers. Let
thine own hands take away her life; I shall
give the opportunity at Milford-Haven; she
hath my letter for the purpose; where, if thou
fear to strike, and to make me certain it is
done, thou art the pandar to her dishonour and
equally to me disloyal.

Pis. What shall I need to draw my sword? the paper
Hath cut her throat already.²⁵³

Shocked, horrified, Imogen protests her innocence and begs Pisanio to do his master's bidding and kill her at once. As she apparently starts to expose her heart to his knife, she comes upon letters tucked in her dress.

Imo. Come, here's my heart.
Something's afore't; soft, soft! we'll no defence;
Obedient as the scabbard. What is here?
The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus
All turn'd to heresy! Away, away!
Corrupters of my faith; you shall no more
Be stomachers to my heart.²⁵⁴

²⁵³Ibid., III, iv, ll. 3-6, 18-35.

²⁵⁴Ibid., ll. 80-86.

Seen again at a time like this, the letters she had so lovingly cherished add a deep touch of pathos to Imogen's despair.

Pisanio suggests that she disguise herself as a page in garments he had brought for that purpose, and that she seek employment with the ambassador, "Lucius the Roman, [who] comes to Milford-Haven Tomorrow." Returning with Lucius to Rome, she may be "haply, near the residence of Posthumus" and so learn what had caused his change of heart. Before leaving to return to the court, Pisanio gives her a something he thinks may be useful:

Pis. Here is a box, I had it from the queen,
What's in 't is precious; if you are sick at sea,
Or stomach-qualm'd at land, a dram of this
Will drive away distemper.²⁵⁵

When Pisanio returns to the court, Cloten, furious because Imogen has rejected him scornfully, demands to know where she has fled. The loyal servant refuses to tell him, but is finally forced to it on pain of instant death.

Pis. Then, sir,
This paper is the history of my knowledge
Touching her flight. Presenting a letter.
Clo. Let's see't. I will pursue her
Even to Augustus' throne.
Pis. Aside. Or this, or perish.
She's far enough; and what he learns by this
May prove his travel, not her danger.
Clo. Hum!
Pis. Aside. I'll write to my lord she's dead. O Imogen!
Safe mayst thou wander, safe return agen!
Clo. Sirrah, is this letter true?
Pis. Sir, as I think.
Clo. It is Posthumus' hand; I know't.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Ibid., II, 191-194.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., III, v, II, 97-108.

One would assume that the letter is the same one in which Posthumus had directed Pisanio to take Imogen to Milford-Haven, but when Cloten reads it he does not question Pisanio as to whether or not he had murdered her, so for the time the letter remains a mystery.

Cloten sets off to capture the lovers, planning first to kill Posthumus "in her eyes that she may see my valour," and then, because Imogen had told him she valued him less than she did a suit of her husband's clothes—

Clo. . . . when my lust hath dined,
--which, as I say, to vex her, I will execute in
the clothes that she so praised, --to the court I'll
knock her back, foot her home again.²⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Imogen has been given shelter in a cave by "Morgan" (actually Belarius, a noble banished from Cymbeline's court many years before), and by his two "sons," in reality her long-lost brothers, Guiderius and Arviragus, whom Belarius had stolen as infants when he was banished. They treat her with great kindness, but she is "sick still, sick at heart," and while her rescuers are off on a hunting trip, takes some of the medicine Pisanio had given her and falls in a death-like trance. On the hunting trip Guiderius meets Cloten, who threatens to kill him as an outlaw; whereupon Guiderius cuts his head off and later tosses it in a stream. Returning to their cave the brothers find Imogen apparently dead, and they bury her with great grief (and a lovely dirge) on a mound of flowers. Because Cloten was, after all, a prince, they lay his body beside hers.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 11. 116-119.

Imogen awakes, sees the headless body dressed in Posthumus' clothes, and blames Pisanio for what she now considers forged letters.

Imo. . . . Thou,
Conspir'd with that irregular devil, Cloten,
Hast here cut off my lord. To write and read
Be henceforth treacherous. Damn'd Pisanio,
Hath with his forged letters, damn'd Pisanio,
From this most bravest vessel of the world
Struck the main-top. O Posthumus! alas!²⁵⁸

She believes "This is Pisanio's deed, and Cloten's," that the former intentionally gave her the sleep-producing drug but that only the latter could have been so vicious as to cut off Posthumus' head, and that the letters she had thought were from her husband must have been forged. All her faith in Posthumus' love returns, and she falls, weeping, on the body. In this case, it is a misinterpretation of a true letter as having been false which reverses Imogen's estimate of both master and servant.

In the final scene the captured Romans are led before Cymbeline; Iachimo (one of them) is forced to confess his treachery, and the Roman general's page "Fidele" (Imogen) is restored to her father and to her husband, who had fought bravely on the British side. The Queen is dead, but the mystery of Cloten's disappearance remains.

Cym. . . . her son
Is gone, we know not how, nor where.
Pis. My lord,
Now fear is from me, I'll speak troth. Lord Cloten,
Upon my lady's missing, came to me
With his sword drawn, foam'd at the mouth, and swore
If I discover'd not which way she was gone,
It was my instant death. By accident,
I had a feigned letter of my master's

²⁵⁸ Ibid., IV, ii, ll. 314-320.

Then in my pocket, which directed him
 To seek her on the mountains near Milford;
 Where, in a frenzy, in my master's garments,
 Which he enforc'd from me, away he posts.²⁵⁹

Pisanio's speech leads, through steps not necessary to trace here, to the final reconciliation and restorations of the play: the banished Belarius is restored to Cymbeline's favor, and the lost sons to their father. But the problem of the "feigned letter" remains. Cloten had said he recognized Posthumus' handwriting in the letter which Pisanio had showed him, but had asked no questions as to whether or not, and if not why not, Pisanio had carried out the order to kill Imogen. If the letter were indeed feigned, it might well have excluded the order to kill Imogen, but in answering that question another is automatically posed: how could Pisanio, "by accident," have a feigned letter of his master's in his pocket at that time? Even if he had had the time to prepare such a letter after his return from Imogen, he would have needed uncanny foresight to have forged a letter so exactly suited to the eventuality. The very wording of Pisanio's statement is ambiguous: "a feigned letter of my master's . . . which directed him To seek her . . . near to Milford." If "of" means by his master, as Cloten's recognition of the handwriting implies, why would Posthumus be writing to direct himself to go to Milford? Was Shakespeare, in his semi-retirement, getting careless? He had not lost his skill when he composed The Tempest, which followed Cymbeline. A possible answer to these problems may be to

²⁵⁹ Ibid., V, v, ll. 273-284.

fasten the blame on Shakespeare's unknown collaborator, although that is the "pretty poor criticism" Granville-Barker warned against.

It is difficult to avoid blaming the collaborator for the last letter in the play, which Posthumus asks Lucius, the Roman general, to get his soothsayer to explain.

Post. . . . Good my lord of Rome,
Call forth your soothsayer. As I slept, methought
Great Jupiter, upon his eagle back'd,
Appear'd to me, with other spritely shows
Of mine own kindred: when I wak'd, I found
This label on my bosom; whose containing
Is so from sense in hardness that I can
Make no collection of it; let him show
His skill in the construction.

Luc. Philarmonus!

Sooth. Here, my good lord.

Luc. Read, and declare the meaning.

Sooth. When as a lion's whelp shall, to him-
self unknown, without seeking find, and be en-
braced by a piece of tender air; and when from
a stately cedar shall be lopped branches, which,
being dead many years, shall after revive, be
jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow; then
shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be
fortunate, and flourish in peace and plenty.²⁶⁰

The soothsayer's explanation of this "letter of the oracle" must have been intended for the groundlings in the pit. The "lion's whelp" is Leo-natus; "tender air" is mollis aer or mulier (woman) and refers to "this most constant wife," Imogen; the "stately cedar" is Cymbeline, and the "lopped branches" are his stolen sons now restored to him; the eagle is Rome, and Jove will bring peace between Rome and Britain. In spite of his own admonition, Granville-Barker says of the apparition and its "rubbish":

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 11. 426-443.

[They] are not only, one swears, not Shakespeare's, but could hardly have been perpetrated even by the perpetrator of the worst of the rest of the play. One searches for a whipping-boy to the whipping-boy; the prompter, possibly, kept in between rehearsal and performance, thumbing it down between bites and sips of his bread and cheese and ale.²⁶¹

To summarize: Cymbeline as a whole contains two references which are only to the expected use of letters: Posthumus' request that Imogen write to him at Rome, and her request to Pisanio to meet each ship which may bring letters to her from Posthumus. There are also the letters (which are used on the stage but their contents not given), which Imogen snatches from the bosom of her dress when she asks Pisanio to kill her, and which she throws to the winds. These are all Shakespeare's invention, and all--especially the last--add to characterization but not to plot.

Of the remaining letters, the first two are those which Iachimo carries from Posthumus to Imogen: the private letter whose contents are unknown but warm "the very middle" of her heart, and the formal, flattering letter of introduction with which Posthumus has proudly but foolishly given his opponent a decisive advantage in their wager. Both letters are seen on the stage; the contents of the first are implied by Imogen's charming reaction, and the second is presented verbatim. The letter from Imogen which Iachimo carries to Posthumus is also seen on the stage, and although its contents are known only in a negative way, it is used with important dramatic effect; in it Imogen had not written that she was sending Posthumus her bracelet, a fact which Iachimo uses

²⁶¹Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 460.

to force Posthumus to an agonizing acceptance of Imogen's infidelity. This provides the impulse for the next two letters from Posthumus: the one to Imogen directing her toward Milford-Haven, and the one to Pisanio ordering him to murder her. The first of these is the only letter based on Shakespeare's sources; both are seen on the stage and their contents are made known; they reveal character--especially that of Imogen--sympathetically and forcefully; and, what is most important, they are the pivots on which most of the remainder of the action turns. Indirectly they also lead to subsequent events which unite the major and minor plots.

The last two letters--the one given by Pisanio to Cloten and the letter of Jupiter's oracle--reveal, in the opinion of this writer as well as in the opinion of others, the inferior craftsmanship of a collaborator. This suggests another value, in addition to evidence of Shakespeare's development as a dramatic artist, which may be derived from a study of his use of letters. Various aspects of his art, such as imagery, versification, characterization, and plot construction, are examined by scholars in their pursuit of internal evidence of the authenticity of doubtful plays or portions of plays credited to Shakespeare; might not an examination of the letters be added to this critical apparatus?

Although Cymbeline is considered a romance and it does have a happy ending, it had three quite unpleasant villains in the persons of Iachimo, Cloten, and the Queen, who got in a deal of dirty work before they were through. For this reason it is also considered a tragi-comedy, and may be regarded as a stepping stone from the dark tragedies to the

serene romances of The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, each of which has only one villain and he repents.

The Winter's Tale (ca. 1610-11)²⁶² is a dramatic romance based on one of Robert Greene's most popular novels, Pandosto: The Triumph of Time.²⁶³ It was first published in 1588, and its long popularity is attested to by the fact that it was reprinted twice more in the sixteenth century and seven times in the seventeenth century. The edition of 1632 was the last to bear the original title; in the 1636 edition and those that followed it bore the title The Pleasant History of Dorastus and Fawnia. Shakespeare's play is essentially a dramatization of the novel.

There is only one letter in Pandosto. This is the reply given by the oracle of Delphos in answer to the question concerning the Queen's chastity. Shakespeare follows almost exactly the wording of this letter, but there are some slight differences in the way in which he handles it.

In the play, Leontes, King of Sicillia, falsely accuses his loyal and gracious wife, Hermione, of being in love with his visiting friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia. He sends two competent couriers to Delphos to question the Oracle of Apollo concerning the truth of his jealous accusations.

Leon. . . . I have dispatch'd in post
To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple,

²⁶²Shakespeare, op. cit., The Winter's Tale, pp. 371-406.

²⁶³Robert Greene, Greene's 'Pandosto' or 'Dorastus and Fawnia' Being the Original of Shakespeare's 'Winter's Tale' Newly Edited by P. G. Thomas (New York: Duffield & Company, 1907).

Cleomenes and Dion, whom you know
Of stuff'd sufficiency. Now, from the oracle
They will bring us all; whose spiritual counsel had,
Shall stop or spur me. Have I done well?

First Lord. Well done, my lord.

Leon. Though I am satisfied and need no more
Than what I know, yet shall the oracle
Give rest to the minds of others, . . . 264

Leontes' jealousy has blinded him to justice; his vanity is concerned with public opinion, which considers Hermione chaste and sadly wronged; he does not seek the truth but only public confirmation of his accusations. In the meantime, Hermione is kept in prison, and when their infant daughter is born there he orders the baby abandoned, claiming it is not his but Polixenes' child.

When the couriers return with the Oracle's answer, Leontes summons the court and its officers in session. The importance attached to the sacred words of the Oracle is shown by the elaborate formalities accorded the reply.

Offi. You here shall swear upon this sword of justice
That you, Cleomenes and Dion, have
Been both at Delphos, and from thence have brought
This seal'd-up oracle by the hand deliver'd
Of great Apollo's priest, and that since then
You have not dar'd to break the holy seal
Nor read the secrets in 't.

Cleon.)

Dion.)

All this we swear.

Leon. Break up seals and read.

Offi. Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten; and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found! 265

²⁶⁴Shakespeare, op. cit., The Winter's Tale, II, i, ll. 181-190.

²⁶⁵Ibid., III, ii, ll. 125-137.

Shakespeare followed Greene closely in the wording of the message from Delphos except for his omission of the first two clauses, which in Pandosto read, "Suspicion is no proof; jealousy is an unequal judge; . . ."²⁶⁶ Why did he omit these introductory words, although the rest of the message reproduces his source almost verbatim? It seems to me that by omitting what were merely that--introductory words, or general comments, if you please--he gained considerably in dramatic effectiveness. In Shakespeare's message there are no preliminary statements to soften the impact of the series of direct, powerful blows which smash in turn each of Leontes' misjudgments. The only other significant change in wording also adds to the impact of the message in Shakespeare's play: Greene's novel has the oracle simply call Pandosto "jealous," but in Shakespeare's play the oracle calls him a "jealous tyrant," which strikes at his character as a king as well as that as a man.

Usually the advice of oracles was given in obscure language, subject to misinterpretation, but in this case only the last clause was vague; the choice of absolute clarity in all points concerning Hermione's trial shows both Greene's and Shakespeare's artistry in making Leontes' refusal to credit the oracle's message all the more reprehensible, and provides for a series of swift dramatic reversals. The first instantaneous reactions to the message--the joy of the lords and the Queen for vindication of her honor--are followed instantly by her husband's arrogantly blind denial of the sacred verdict.

²⁶⁶ Greene, op. cit., Pandosto, p. 26.

Lords. Now blessed be the great Apollo!
Her. Praised!
Leon. Hast thou read truth?
Offi. Aye, my lord, even so
 As it is here set down.
Leon. There is no truth at all i' the oracle. 267
 The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood.

The presentation of the oracle's message in the court is highly dramatic, and it is indeed the stumbling block on which Leontes falls and convicts himself. Two other dramatic events follow immediately--the messenger with the news of the death of his only son, and the death-like collapse of the Queen--which make this entire pivotal scene one of intense excitement throughout, as the King succumbs to swift and terrible penitence.

Leon. . . . the Heavens themselves
 Do strike at my injustice. . . .
 * * *
 Apollo, pardon
 My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle! 268

The next letter in the play is one that must wait sixteen years before it is read. When Antigonus, a gentleman of the Court, is forced to abandon the infant Princess Perdita, he leaves with her rich articles and a letter which he hopes will identify her to whomever may find her:

Ant. There lie; and there thy character: there these,
Laying down a bundle.
 Which may, if fortune please, both breed thee, pretty,
 And still rest thine. . . . 269

267 Shakespeare, op. cit., The Winter's Tale, III, ii, ll. 138-142.

268 Ibid., ll. 147-148, 154-155.

269 Ibid., III, iii, ll. 46-48.

Cam. Sent by the King your father
 To greet him and to give him comforts. Sir,
 The manner of your bearing toward him, with
 What you as from your father shall deliver,
 Things known betwixt us three, I'll write you down.

* * *

. . . my letters, by this means being there 271
 So soon as you arrive, shall clear that doubt.

The promise of these letters is necessary to the action of the play in that they direct the flight of Florizel and Perdita to the court of her father rather than to some unknown place of refuge.

The shepherd's son, the Clown, advises his father that in order to save themselves from threatened punishment they must show King Polixenes the things found with Perdita when they discovered her years ago. These effects include the letter Antigonus had written.

Meanwhile, Prince Florizel presents himself, with Perdita as his bride, to Leontes, but instead of the promised letter from Camillo supporting his story, a messenger comes from his pursuing father asking for his arrest as a runaway.

In this case it is the very absence of letters that creates the dramatic reversal of a scene charged with gently mocking humor. The young Prince, all decked out in his borrowed finery has just proudly presented his beautiful young "wife" at a foreign court and received a royal welcome from his father's old friend--and then his coach suddenly turns pumpkins!

Leontes then goes to meet Polixenes, after having promised Florizel to intercede for him. This task is made unexpectedly easy because

²⁷¹Shakespeare, op. cit., The Winter's Tale, IV, iv, ll. 256-273, 635-636.

the old shepherd has just given Polixenes the letter establishing Perdita's true identity. The happy meeting of the two kings is described by gentlemen of the court.

Sec. Gent. . . . has the king found his heir?

Third Gent. Most true, if ever truth were pregnant by circumstance: that which you hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs. The mantle of Queen Hermione's, her jewel about the neck of it, the letters of Antigonus found with it, which they know to be his character; the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother . . . and many other evidences proclaim her with all certainty to be the King's daughter.²⁷²

Thus the letter left years before with the abandoned infant is a means of restoring her to her penitent father, but its importance to the dénouement is lessened by the number of other valid proofs. Although it was not, therefore, essential to the plot, it served a dramatic purpose as an objective symbol strengthening the romantic mood of the play.

The message from the Oracle of Apollo is the start of Leontes' redemption by penitence; Antigonus' letter is a means of his recovery of Perdita ("the lost one"), and Camillo's promise of letters serves to bring the two families together in a happy reconciliation. The letters in The Winter's Tale are not only parts of the action of the play, but also serve to enhance the three characteristic elements of Shakespeare's romances: redemption, recovery of lost children, and reconciliation.

The limited number of letters in the two romances considered in the final period of Shakespeare's career does not make a statistical

²⁷² Ibid., V, 11, 11. 31-40, 42-43.

comparison as valid as it might be, but such a comparison shows that the percentage of original letters was still high, although not as high as in the preceding period. Shakespeare took only two letters from his sources for these two plays--in Cymbeline the letter from Posthumus directing Imogen to the place where she was to be murdered, and in The Winter's Tale the letter bearing the oracle of Apollo--but each of these letters is the pivot on which the action of the drama turns.

His letters during this period are written in language appropriate to the sender and to the occasion, and they illuminate the characters of the sender and recipient, but they are all more important in connection with plot than with characterization. They give the impression of a practiced craftsman who has used letters as one of the many effective dramatic techniques at his disposal to construct his plot, but not to probe the inner motives of the individual soul or the universal problems confronting mankind, as he had done in the period of the great tragedies, nor to provide humor, pleasant intrigue, or good-natured parody as he had often done in his earlier periods.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The letters which Shakespeare used in the twelve representative plays selected for this study have been examined with specific reference to three questions (page 50 supra); if the findings, therefore, are summarized in accordance with their bearing on these questions, the answers may constitute some valid conclusions to this study.

First, in what ways was Shakespeare's use of letters influenced by preceding and contemporary dramatists?

English drama was based on both classical and native sources. We have seen that letters were used, but rarely, in ancient Greek tragedy and comedy; they were used somewhat more freely in the New Comedy of Menander and his followers, and certainly more freely in the Latin comedy of Plautus and Terence which was based on it. This was essentially a comedy of manners in which letters were employed primarily in connection with the situations and intrigues upon which the plots were constructed; their language was in keeping with the stock characters involved, but portrayed little individuality of characterization. This was the comedy which the Humanists and schoolmen of the early Renaissance revived in the universities, with the performances first in Latin, then in English translations, and finally in adaptations which blended native English elements with Latin prototypes.

The English elements in drama had developed in mystery, miracle, and morality plays. An important characteristic of both non-dramatic

and dramatic English writing in the Middle Ages was its vividness of characterization; even the personified vices in The Vision of Piers Plowman were highly individualized, and Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims were not merely representative types of contemporary English men and women, but living personalities; in like manner the characters in The "Second" Shepherds Play were realistically drawn English shepherds, and those in The Playe Called the Foure P's were vivid take-offs on familiar figures of the time.

One might say that the early Elizabethan playwrights published the banns of the native and classical elements in plays such as Roister Doister, that the University Wits performed the marriage ceremony in plays such as Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay, and that English drama of the 1590's and early 1600's was the promising child of that marriage, an in corpore product, so to speak, of the genes and genius of both parents. To carry the simile a bit further, it was this child prodigy which Shakespeare brought to maturity, to the full, rich, versatile manhood of the high tide of the English Renaissance.

In seven, possibly as many as ten, of the plays which Shakespeare wrote during his "In the Workshop" period he used or adapted earlier plays, some of which had been written by the University Wits. He found in their plays a variety of well-established types of letters: (1) the highly conventional, euphuistic love letter, often written in verse or containing bits of verse; (2) the formal diplomatic letter of state; (3) the double entendre letter, especially popular in farces and comedies; (4) terse military communiques; (5) letters of intrigue--warnings,

implications, petitions, challenges, plots, threats, etc.; (6) friendly letters of normal social intercourse; (7) occupational letters--i.e., legal, commercial, governmental, or clerical; and (8) "messenger" letters, used to inform the audience of events not shown on the stage but important to the action of the play. Shakespeare used all of these kinds of letters, but in none of the plays considered in this study does a new type of letter appear.

It may be appropriate at this point to consider briefly the form of these letters. If one of the purposes of using letters as a dramatic device is to add realism on the stage, then the letters themselves must be written according to accepted patterns for salutation, contents, and complimentary close, and be folded and sealed in customary fashion.²⁷³ Letter writing had become a matter of increasing interest to the rising middle class of Elizabethan England, and handbooks containing both rules and correct sample letters became popular then just as books of etiquette have become among the rising middle class in twentieth century America. The Art of Letter Writing²⁷⁴ by Jean Robertson traces the development of these popular manuals from the learned treatises of early rhetoricians through Erasmus' Libellus de Conscribendi Epistolis (written for one of his English pupils, Robert Fisher, and adapted by Angel Day in The English Secreterie) and William Fulwood's The Enemie of Idle-

²⁷³Harrison, op. cit., p. 1071.

²⁷⁴Jean Robertson, The Art of Letter Writing: An Essay on the Handbooks Published in England During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1943).

nesse: Teaching the manner and stile how to endite, compose, and write all sorts of Epistles and Letters. Roister Doister and Gorboduc (Chapter II supra) were written before the publication of Fulwood's handbook, but their authors were university men and may be presumed to have been acquainted with some of the Latin formularies, such as that of Erasmus, which preceded it. Roister Doister's letter to Mistress Custance is an obvious, though laughable, attempt to follow the correct form for a suitor, and the letter from Dordan to Gorboduc is written in the language and style appropriate for a counsellor's report to his sovereign.

Kyd, Greene, and Marlowe, the authors of the plays discussed in Chapter III (supra), also may well have been acquainted with some of the Latin formularies, and perhaps with Fulwood's handbook as well, inasmuch as it was published in London in 1568 and ran into seven more editions by 1621. Terry Hawkes (University of Buffalo), in an article in Notes & Queries, notes that "its publishing history virtually spans Shakespeare's life," and offers some quite precise and convincing evidence that the book was "to Shakespeare's hand when he wrote his plays."²⁷⁵

The writer of this present study examined the model letters in The Enemy of Idleness at the Folger Library in February 1964 and noted many similarities in form and style between them and the letters which Shakespeare and his immediate predecessors used in their plays. Examples from the latter which may be recalled are the diplomatic letter of

²⁷⁵Terry Hawkes, "Ficino and Shakespeare," Notes & Queries, Vol. 203 (New Series, Vol. 5, 1958), p. 168.

state from the King of Spain to the Viceroy of Portugal in The Spanish Tragedy, the governmental report from the French agent Levune to the younger Spencer in Edward II, and Lacie's stilted social letter to Margaret in Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay. From Shakespeare we have examples of love letters in Two Gentlemen of Verona, of diplomatic and personal letters in Hamlet, of a personal letter in Macbeth, and of parodies of letters such as the forged letter in Twelfth Night, Hamlet's letter to Ophelia in Hamlet, and of other types which need not be recalled here.

Shakespeare's "little Latin" at the grammar school in Stratford may have included some study of the Latin formularies, but in any event the evidence that he knew Fulwood's handbook leads one to surmise that he was not greatly indebted to other playwrights for the style and language of his letters. It was in the use of letters as a dramatic device that he appears to have owed more to preceding and contemporary dramatists. He found letters used by them in a variety of ways: (1) to initiate or motivate action, (2) to create surprise and suspense, (3) to bring about a climax, (4) to resolve conflict or mystery, (5) to reveal character, (6) to increase the illusion of reality, (7) to add humor, irony, or pathos, (8) to establish mood or atmosphere, (9) to connect or relate various elements or sub-plots, (10) to report events occurring off-stage, and (11) for a combination of two or more of these purposes. Shakespeare, too, used letters in all these ways, but he differed from his predecessors chiefly in the greater variety, flexibility, and concentration of these elements in individual letters.

A simple numerical table (Appendix B) indicates the relative

frequency of Shakespeare's use of letters in comparison with that of his sources, and the extent of his reliance on, or independence of, these sources. In the twelve plays considered in this study, Shakespeare used letters sixty-eight times, and his sources, only forty-one times. Fifty-two of the letters Shakespeare used were original with him, and only sixteen (less than a third) were derived from his sources; twenty-five of those in his sources he did not use at all. It appears, therefore, that Shakespeare was not only indebted to his predecessors and contemporaries for the practice of using letters as a dramatic device, and for the various types of letters so employed; he was also indebted, but to a much lesser extent, to his individual sources for particular letters which he actually used in his own plays. Finally, it may be noted that in general Shakespeare used letters more frequently than his sources had used them; this may be due in part, as Dr. Moroney suggests, to his desire to capitalize on a currently popular interest.²⁷⁶

The second general area of consideration in this study is to examine in what ways, if any, Shakespeare's use of letters shows superior dramatic skill.

One approach to such a comparison is to observe his use of the letters derived from his sources. Even when using the same or closely similar letters, he gets greater "mileage" out of them by not merely using them as a device in reference to the play as a whole, but by dramatizing the presentation of the letters themselves. For example,

²⁷⁶Moroney, op. cit. (See Appendix A)

while Montemayer's Felismena rejects a letter from Don Felix and then asks her maid to return it, Shakespeare's Julia tears up Proteus' letter, then gathers up the pieces and kisses them as she tries to read them. There are other examples of this technique: the Duke of Milan doesn't say to Valentine, "I have received a letter that your friend Proteus is coming here," but, in effect, "Guess what good news I have!" Beatrice, it is said, sits up late in her nightie, alternately writing and tearing up billets doux to Benedict. A desperate Hamlet stealthily substitutes a forged letter in a ship's cabin. The oracle's answer is delivered with great pomp and ceremony to Leontes. Heart-broken Imogen tears Posthumus' cherished letters to bits and tosses them to the winds. Coy Silvia artfully teaches Valentine how to compose love letters--to her! Artemidorus presses through the crowd with his fateful warning, and his "Hail, Caesar!" is met with "What! is the fellow mad?" All these, whether presented on the stage or only to the imagination, constitute thumb-nail playlets in themselves. Thomson says:

He [Shakespeare] knew as well as any that verbal magic alone will not make a play. He must contrive to give the characters naturalness, the incidents vividness . . .²⁷⁷

The manner in which Shakespeare presents these letters does just that, and makes for good "theatre" in so doing.

In the composition of the letters themselves Shakespeare generally shows superior craftsmanship. While those of his sources and contemporaries were often stereotyped and lengthy, Shakespeare's were

²⁷⁷Thomson, op. cit., p. 236.

usually compact and highly personalized; e.g., Sir Andrew's "excellently ignorant" challenge; the terse, impassioned notes written "in several hands" by Cassius to Brutus; and Hamlet's impatient and enigmatic letter to Ophelia.

Frequently, where his source presents a letter verbatim, Shakespeare will suggest its contents in snatches or by implication, or simply by the recipient's reaction. Claudius indicates the gist of his letter to England with a short phrase and a fervent hope; Troilus rejects Cressida's "words, words, mere words" in a passion of outraged bitterness; imagination may run wild over the contents of Hamlet's letter to his mother; Silvia dismisses Proteus' letter with the disdainful comment that it is "stuffed with protestations"; the piercing grief and remorse which Romeo's farewell letter must have brought his father are suggested in four short lines; and bells are rung for joy when Leontes receives the letter which Antigonus had left with the infant Perdita. In short, Shakespeare exhibits superior economy, vividness, and imaginative power when he employs artistic suggestion rather than verbatim presentation in the handling of many of his letters.

Shakespeare packs more different kinds of use into a single letter than do most of his fellow dramatists. The letter which Hamlet forges in Belleforest's play simply affects the course of action, as an important mechanical device. In Shakespeare's Hamlet it is used primarily for the same purpose, but it also comes alive as an instrument of characterization, irony, suspense, and mood--dramatic in itself and wholly Hamlet's. There is frequently a luxuriance in the variety of

dramatic effects skilfully blended in a single Shakespeare letter.

The final quod est desideratum of this study is to determine what a chronological study of Shakespeare's use of letters may reveal of his personal development as a dramatist.

There are nine letters in the two plays studied as representative of the period when Shakespeare was "in the workshop," learning his craft by acting, imitating, adapting, and absorbing. Almost half (about 44 per cent) of these letters were taken from his sources, a fact which indicates his early reliance on them. The language of those in the light comedy is clever and witty, and sometimes verbose; in the lyric tragedy it is simple and direct. Those expressing a playful spirit seem more appropriately handled than the serious letters, and their imagery is light and sometimes fantastic. Those written in regular verse forms, and even those in prose, seem to come off better than those written in blank verse. The characterization revealed in them manifests principally surface traits of personality rather than internal motives or conflict, and technically they assist in the intrigue but only one (Friar Lawrence's undelivered letter) is essential to the action of the play.

There are twenty-eight letters in the four plays studied as representative of the period when Shakespeare was "in the world," rising to prominence as both actor and playwright in the expanding world of the theatre and in the London of the great Queen. Only a fourth (exactly 25 per cent) of these letters were taken from his sources, a fact which shows his increasing self-reliance as a dramatist, and he uses letters much more frequently and in a greater variety of ways. The

language of the letters is more individualized and more dramatic; their imagery is more rich and subtle; there is freer use of blank verse; the serious letters are as skilfully done as the light ones; the characterization reveals internal drives as well as external traits of character; and technically they form a more integral part of the action.

There are twenty-three letters in the four plays studied for the period when Shakespeare was writing "out of the depths," possibly of some shattering experience. Only about one-eighth of these (13 per cent) were taken from his sources, a fact which shows an even greater independence than in the preceding period. His letters also show his increasing skill both in the composition of the letters themselves and in his dramatic handling of them. Their language is more compact and concentrated; there is greater richness and variety in their figures of speech, symbolism, and prosody; their revelation of character is subtle and intense, probing deep emotions and inner conflicts; not the external fact of the letters themselves or their surface meanings but the passions and drives of their authors mold the action of the play; and the letters as a whole seem to carry more symbolic significance and often to express a philosophy that is universal in application and in meaning to us. This is what Harrison calls Shakespeare's "Overflowing Period," when

. . . his thoughts and feelings were coming too thick and powerful for balanced expression . . . ; the idea in Shakespeare's mind did not always travel along the usual conductor of grammatical sentences, but leapt across in some mighty image which only laborious paraphrase can reduce to everyday speech.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸Harrison, op. cit., p. 71.

Hamlet's "They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy" in his letter to Horatio, and his "To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes" in his letter to Claudius are examples of such writing; so also is Cordelia's reaction to Kent's letter, when she "Cried, 'Sisters! sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters! . . . What! i' the storm? i' the night?'"

There are eight letters in the two plays studied for the period when Shakespeare was "on the heights." Two of these (25 per cent) were taken from his sources, one in each play, but they are essential to the plot; the others are original with Shakespeare. In this period, as in the three preceding ones, the total number of letters which Shakespeare used exceeds the total number which all his sources used. Harrison characterizes this period as one in which Shakespeare "achieved perfect mastery and balance between thought, phrase, and meaning."²⁷⁹ This balance and clarity are seen in the letters of Leonatus in Cymbeline and in the oracle's message in The Winter's Tale. There is no striving for expression in the letters of this period; their numbers flow strongly and smoothly from the hands of the virtuoso.

Through the years scholars and critics have traced Shakespeare's artistic development in a variety of ways--through his plot construction, versification, imagery, characterization, philosophy, etc. A study of the letters in his plays, although limited in scope, seems to constitute a valid method also, and the conclusions derived from it appear not to

²⁷⁹Ibid., p. 72.

call in question but to underscore those derived from other avenues of approach.

Shakespeare, the master craftsman, took the age-old letter in the drama and breathed into it the breath of life.

Because, the singer of an age, he sang
The passions of the ages,
It was humanity itself that leaped
To life upon his pages.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Agnes Lee, "Shakespeare," The New Poetry, ed. Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 275.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Abstracts of Dissertations and Monographs in Microform
University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan: 1956

The Letter as a Dramatic Device in Shakespeare's Plays
(Publication No. 16,979), 155 pages, Mic 56-2263.

Katherine Elizabeth Moroney, Ph. D.

University of Oklahoma, 1956

Supervisor: Professor Joseph H. Marshburn.

England of the sixteenth century felt the impulse of humanistic endeavor which extended education beyond the confines of church and castle. At the same time, an expanding economic system increased the middle class whose growing business and social activity necessitated a knowledge of epistolography. Merchants required an epistolary form and style flexible enough for them to wield, not the style of the Latin formularies. This demand was met by the practical English letter writers of the latter half of the sixteenth century, a phase of the democratization of education inspired by the Humanists. These handbooks appeared in considerable numbers from the time of the first extant one in 1568.

That Shakespeare was acutely conscious of the increasing interest in letter writing can be inferred by his many references to the letter--well over 180 references. More than 140 letters are used in his plays; of this group 92 are certainly seen on the stage; others may have been. Forty-two are read or paraphrased.

It would ignore the importance of the letter in the dramas to say that Shakespeare was merely capitalizing on a topical interest. He found the device was dramatically effective. It allows for intimacy with the audience. Since the letter is written in the first person, the audience feels vicariously in the position of the recipient of the letter. In the traditional phases of the plot, it serves as a means for compression and selectivity; it integrates plot and sub-plot. It recapitulates off-stage action with an immediacy of effect. Frequently, by introducing or concealing information, it engenders suspense.

Like the soliloquy and aside, the letter through its style, either forthright or veiled, reveals the innermost character of the writer. Comments of the recipient as he reads it disclose his character. It brings an absent character to a scene sometimes with even more force than his actual presence. The spectators enter creatively into the illusion of the stage, for they must envision the absent one.

The content of the letters may express gaiety, satire, seriousness, love, evil; the style may inspire laughter or tears. Letters are in prose and verse, with the rhythm of the scene being manipulated to

emphasize the message. Letters often engender much comic activity, much sheer entertainment. On the stage the letter is as vital as a character since it has voice and movement. It calls attention to itself because it is written material being read. For that reason emotional response, either motivated by a comic or tragic impulse within the letter, must be retained until the lines are read, only to explode in laughter or to react in pity and fear. Thus, the letter assists in creating tone and atmosphere. For these reasons Shakespeare, realizing its dramatic effectiveness, used and re-used the letter in his plays.

APPENDIX B

NUMERICAL TABLE
LETTERS IN TWELVE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS AND THEIR SOURCES

Per- iod	Play	Total in Sources	Sources Only	Shakes- peare & Sources	Shakes- peare Only	Total in Shakes- peare
I.	<u>Two Gentlemen of Verona</u>	5	3	2	4	6
	<u>Romeo and Juliet</u>	3	1	2	1	3
	Sub-totals	8	4	4	5	9
II.	<u>I Henry IV</u>	3	3	0	7	7
	<u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>	1	1	0	4	4
	<u>Julius Caesar</u>	9	4	5	8	13
	<u>Twelfth Night</u>	2	0	2	2	4
	Sub-totals	15	8	7	21	28
III.	<u>Troilus and Cressida</u>	9	8	1	3	4
	<u>Hamlet</u>	1	0	1	5	6
	<u>King Lear</u>	4	3	1	11	12
	<u>Macbeth</u>	1	1	0	1	1
	Sub-totals	15	12	3	20	23
IV.	<u>Cymbeline</u>	2	1	1	4 or 6 *	5 or 7 *
	<u>The Winter's Tale</u>	1	0	1	2	3
	Sub-totals	3	1	2	6 or 8 *	8 or 10 *
	TOTALS	41	25	16	52	68

* Bottom figures include the two letters in Cymbeline which were probably not the work of Shakespeare. These two are not included in the totals in this chart or in the discussions in Chapter IV.

VITA

VITA

Clara R. Beery was born on December 4, 1906, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and attended public schools in that city. She was graduated from Mary Baldwin Seminary with a Diploma in Expression (junior college level), and in 1928 received a B.A. degree from Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia, with majors in English and Latin. In 1929 she received a B.S. degree from Madison College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, with majors in social studies and secondary education and a minor in mathematics.

She was employed at Handley High School in Winchester, Virginia, from September 1929 through August 1936, teaching social studies during the regular winter sessions, and English, Latin, algebra, geometry, and social studies in the summer sessions. From September 1936 to February 1943 she taught in public secondary schools in Washington, D.C., at first some English and some social studies classes, but eventually all in the field of English. Concurrently, in 1938-39 and 1939-40, she taught English in one of the public night high schools for adults.

She attended the Graduate School of Duke University, Durham, N. C., in the summers of 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1942, where she completed fifteen semester hours in English and six semester hours in history. In the winter of 1940-41 she attended evening classes at the Graduate School of American University in Washington, and completed six semester hours in history, credit for which was accepted by Duke University.

In February 1943 she obtained military leave from the D.C. Board of Education and enrolled in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. She com-